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The Study of An Old Tyme Fiddling Club: Re-creation of Rural Community

by

Lisa Anne Stormer ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Music

Edmonton, Alberta

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled The Study of An Old Tyme Fiddling Club: Re-creation of Rural Community submitted by Lisa Anne Stormer in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

This is a study of the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association in Edmonton, Alberta. The first chapter deals with background information on the club, including a description of the members and the club. The second chapter focuses on the origins of old tyme music in Canada and the United States, the communities where it is found, its practitioners, instruments and the music. This study situates this musical practice in relation to its rural roots. The third chapter deals with the central idea of this study that by using music as the medium, the club re-creates the social bonds found within rural communities of the early twentieth century. This re-creation involves the use of the members' memories and thus, many issues of memory are discussed such as collective memory, recall, distortion and the validity of memory. Finally, one concludes that the club re-creates an idealized version of rural community.

Preface

Old tyme is a rich and varied musical genre. It shares characteristics with country and western and bluegrass, yet it is neither. Instead, old tyme music is the ancestor of both of these genres. From old tyme, a rural music, grew these more popular styles of bluegrass and country. Although not nearly as popular as its prodigies, old tyme music is still performed and loved by many people. Its roots lie in small, rural communities of Canada and the Southern United States.

Old tyme music ensembles consist of either one instrument or a group of up to ten or more instruments. The most common instruments of an old tyme ensemble are the fiddle, banjo, guitar, and harmonica. Fiddle and harmonica often sound the melody while the rest provide the "backtime" or accompaniment. The music is either entirely instrumental or includes vocals, and one instrument generally leads the song while the rest provide the accompaniment.

The culture surrounding old tyme music is just as significant as the instruments. Gatherings of old tyme musicians tend to bring together people who are from rural communities or who were originally from small towns. While the music is played there is a constant stream of talking and visiting, both between the musicians and the audience.

To the old tyme musician, the opportunity to make music is why many come out to dances, clubs and contests. To the observer or outsider,

the music could be said to be the medium which draws the participants together. But the relationships and socializing are just as important. However, music also provides a common interest or goal among the participants, thereby re-creating an atmosphere of an earlier time.

In this study of the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association, I propose that the club exists for two purposes. Foremost is a common interest in old tyme music. The goal of the club is to promote and preserve old tyme music. I propose that on another level the club appears to be re-creating the past through reliance on participant's memories. The club re-enacts the social gatherings of the past, of rural communities throughout Canada and the United States. Those gatherings consisted of neighbours, friends and relatives coming together at someone's house for an evening of music and visiting. These gatherings too, are informal; for example, someone brings a fiddle, another a guitar, and all spontaneously play music together or jam. However, the outcome of these meetings is not just the preservation of the music but rather the renewal and preservation of the social relationships and bonds found within small communities. The Wild Rose Association, through these musical jams re-create the social bonds that were found in these small towns within a large urban centre, namely, Edmonton, Alberta.

In order to assess this idea I will first look at old tyme music historically, focusing on its origins, practitioners and instruments.

Second, I will examine rural towns and communities of the early twentieth century. Both the economic and social aspects of these communities need to be examined in order to understand the social relationships found there. Lastly, the issue of memory must be addressed. Much of my study relies on the past and on oral accounts of the past and re-creating the past of an oral tradition requires reliance on memory. Consequently, issues associated with memory, such as collective memory, cultural knowledge and memory distortion, must be addressed. In addition, the question of authenticity when employing oral sources cannot be overlooked.

Previous studies of old tyme music tend to be from one of two perspectives: (1), the analysis of the music itself, with little regard to the culture surrounding it or (2), the tracing or mapping and transformation of old tyme tunes, again with little mention of the culture. Grounded in the discipline of ethnomusicology, my study incorporates ideas from the disciplines of history, folklore and sociology, focusing on the past through the memories of people in the present. I hope to show how a musical genre, even as small as old tyme, can both influence and affect the way people interact with one another, by incorporating both a historical and sociological perspective of memory into an ethnomusicological study. The Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association proved to be the ideal community with which to carry out this endeavor.

This study can be situated in the discipline of ethnomusicology in the recent trend of doing fieldwork in the researcher's own community. Attempting this study within the town I live means that I will likely see these people again which makes me accountable to them. Based on the locality and the social nature of this fieldwork domain, this study has been a partnership between myself and the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association. In their book, Visions of Sound: Musical Instruments of First Nations Communities in Northeastern America (1994) Beverley Diamond, M. Sam Cronk, and Franziska von Rosen see their relationship with their consultants as:

> We, the writers, are rather like shells on the seashore: the "waves" break on us in a certain manner, we return their energy and send it out, yet we each have a distinctive voice. The book is, in effect, a series of gifts (stories, teachings, drawings, access to artifacts) made from members of the Native community to us, reflected on by us, and passed on with their permission to you, the reader.[1]

The partnership is this study is one of reciprocity; the members have shared their knowledge, experiences and memories of old tyme music to me and I have contributed towards their goal of preserving and promoting old tyme music.

The few written sources dealing with old tyme music are scattered and do not provide a clear account of the tradition. I have gathered these

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[1] Beverley Diamond, M. Sam Cronk, and Franziska von Rosen, Visions of Sound: Musical Instruments of First Nations Communities in Northeastern America (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1994), p. 14.

sources together, as well as using oral sources and have attempted to give a composite picture of old tyme music. The first two chapters of this study deal with the club and with the genre of old tyme music. They contribute to the club's goal of preserving old tyme music and they can be used by the club to promote themselves and their music.

In this kind of ethnomusicological work , the researcher is faced with the ethical dilemma of how best to represent the people studied. Training and personal feelings furnished an answer for this study. Foremost this study is about old tyme music and its practitioners. Therefore, I wanted the people I was writing about to understand and to be able to use this study. However I also wanted to provide effective information about this group so that other scholars would be able to use it. In addition I needed to communicate to others the richly meaningful role of music in transmitting shared values and re-creating community and bonds of friendship, based on shared memory constructions and experience.

To fulfill both of these elements I did two deliberate things: first, I chose to write the first two chapters in a style of language that approximates everyday speech. My decision to write these two chapters in this way arose primarily from the focus on the history of old tyme music and its music-makers. I felt that these chapters would be the most

valuable to the club's members, so I chose to write them in a language that would be accessible to them.

Second, I chose to write the third chapter and the conclusion in a style that would be more "academic." By this I mean that the language, content and style are not written in everyday language, but on an accepted, scholarly level. Evidence of this can be found both in the references cited, information and ideas discussed and in the language employed.

By this decision to change language styles within this study, I hope to reconcile the conflicting desire to provide useful information to the group I have studied, and to have attained the level of scholarship required by my colleagues in this field. My choice to divide this study equally between satisfying my collaborators and fulfilling my colleagues expectations will hopefully not render this work less useful or less worthy to both.

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Introduction: Experiences Of An Old Tyme Fiddling Club

It is 7:30 Thursday evening in early October as the parking lot in front of the tiny hall run by the Millhurst Community League begins to fill. A glance around the parking lot shows many vans, jeeps, old Fords and Oldsmobiles. From inside the hall the faint strains of a fiddle and a rumbling undercurrent of laughter and talking drift outside. Upon entering through the front doors there is an immediate awareness of smoke, socializing and music. To the left is a small room filled with twenty or so people. A tin sits on a small table labelled "$2.00 Admission." Beside this are a number of name tags marked "The Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's" and a sign-in book.

Inside the quarters are cozy without being cramped. Off to one side, on the kitchen counter sits a coffee machine that will fill many cups throughout the evening. At the farthest side of the room there is gathering of people, mostly women of retirement age, who have pulled together a group of chairs and are chatting amongst themselves. This group forms the core of the audience for the musicians, and are also members of the fiddling club.

A small circle of chairs is the musicians' domain which will gradually enlarge as the evening progresses. Seated on these chairs and standing around them are the musicians. At this time they are all men, the average age around fifty-five, although later in the night two women

and a girl arrive. Amidst this circle is a long table upon which a soundboard, fiddle cases and various electrical cords rest. Beside the table are two chairs serving as stands for two amplifiers. Inside the circle are two microphone stands that are passed around from musician to musician so that each can lead a song.

At 7:40 p.m. the bass player, two guitar players and a banjo player hammer out an old tyme tune while the other musicians take out their instruments and tune them or play around with a phrase of music. The bass and his group finish performing the song and talk and joke with one another. Meanwhile the rest of the musicians also sit around and talk. After a few minutes, one of the younger male fiddlers walks over to the other side of the circle and picks up the microphone. He starts to play a jig and slowly the other musicians, playing guitar, banjo, bass, harmonica, fiddle and spoons join in to accompany. At the end of his tune the fiddler then passes the microphone to his left and a new fiddler begins to play an old tyme waltz.

During all this music the audience has been doing numerous things other than just listening to the music. They have come not just to listen, but to renew ties with friends and to form new ones. These nights are, in essence, a pretext for visiting. The audience talks about what has been happening in their lives, the lives of their families and the lives of others in the community. Often while they are listening or talking, the various

members of the audience do different crafts such as knitting, sewing, crocheting, etc. In addition they make good use of the coffee machine provided by the club, getting up several times in the evening to refill their cups.

The musicians continue to play throughout the evening until the time approaches 10:00pm. Gradually the musicians pack up their instruments and leave, along with the audience. A few remain and are formed into small groups. They show each other new pieces they are learning and ask advice from other fiddlers on troublesome passages. This is also the time for the musicians to show off a new instrument, ask advice on buying a new one and to generally "chew the fat." By 10:30 the parking lot at Millhurst Community Hall is empty.

At first glance the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association appears to be a place to get together and make music. A closer examination reveals many different layers within the stated goal of making music. The music serves as the means for bringing people together and provides a common interest among the club's members that helps to bond them together. What is unique about this way of getting together to socialize is the particular way music is used to mix with sociality. The music appears to be the vehicle through which the club can socialize, where people come and visit with one another, where everyone is familiar with everyone else. What the club seems to do is re-enact the

social environment of a small town or rural community. How is the club creating the social atmosphere found in rural communities? How does the music feature in this re-enactment and why is it the key to holding this group together?

In the early twentieth century music played an important role in small, rural communities of Alberta. It was instrumental in the lives of rural people, providing excuses to get together with family, with neighbours, or with the whole community. Why was music so important to the people of these rural communities? How has its role changed and is this reflected in old tyme?

There has been little written on the subject of old tyme music. Most of the work done in this field can be divided into two categories: biographical and geographical. Biographical studies usually focus on one or more fiddlers and their musical repetoires, ignoring the social aspect of the music. One example of this type is Harold J. Newlove's book, Fiddlers of the Canadian West which looks at the lives of a number of fiddlers from Swift Current, Saskatchewan. The second type, geographical studies, traces old tyme tunes regionally and analyzes their structure. Chris Goertzen's article in Ethnomusicology, titled "American Fiddle Tunes And the Historic-Geographic Method" is one such study. Again, this type of study does not examine the origins of old tyme music or the roles that it played in the communities that produced it.

The lack of research on old tyme music and the narrow scope of these studies that do exist on the subject raises a number of questions. Why has so little been written about old tyme? Why are there no studies done on the history and development of old tyme music? How did old tyme music figure into the daily lives of people when it was at its height? These questions will be addressed in this study.

My work can be situated within the larger context of fiddling and how it was an important factor in the social life of rural people. From my previous research it appears that there have not been any other studies on old tyme music from this perspective. My study is ethnomusicological and focuses on the sociological aspects of music. Concentrating on the areas of fiddling and old tyme music, I will provide the reader with an historical look at old tyme fiddling: where it originated, what it is, its practitioners, its place in the lives of rural communities up to a generation ago, and its role in the lives of the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association. In the larger context of rural life I will look at the role fiddle music played in the leisure activities of the people in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. I also focus on the social relations and bonds found among these people.

Despite the fact that music was very important in rural life it has been neglected as a topic of study. A possible reason for this is that old tyme music was looked at negatively because it was the music of the

"hillbillies" or lower classes of rural society. Due to the connotations associated with it, this may account for why it is not mentioned specifically in connection with leisure activities of rural communities. A second possible explanation for its absence in literature is that it is not connected to a particular ethnic group and it is therefore difficult to define.

The term old tyme refers to a musical style or genre of music. This genre was first given the designation of "old time" by the record companies in the 1920's. Since then it has had many different spellings including "old-time," "old-tyme," "old tyme," and "old timey." In this study I am using the spelling "old tyme" instead of the more common "old-time." I chose this spelling, even though it can have negative connotations associated with it, because it is the preferred form of the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association.

There appears to be a lack of a definition or identity for old tyme music. When listening to old tyme music it sounds similar to country music and to bluegrass. Old tyme music is the ancestor of these two styles. It originated in rural communities in the nineteenth century and was one of the main sources of entertainment. Old tyme music was created to be dance music, although it could be played just for listening. A working definition of old tyme is a genre, primarily instrumental, that originated in the rural areas of Canada and United States. The fiddle is

of central importance to this genre, exhibiting similar techniques and sound as that of country and western music. A more detailed description of old tyme music will be given in chapter two of this study.

Fieldwork Domain: The Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association

My fieldwork was restricted to the area in which I live, Edmonton, Alberta and it was there that I began my search. While Alberta has a rich, varied musical heritage the one that interested me most was old tyme fiddling music. Through an advertisement in a local newspaper I learned of a club in Edmonton, called the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association. The notice told of a jam session every Thursday evening. I initially went to one of these Thursday evening jam sessions, and still attend when I am able, continually fascinated by it.

My fieldwork options relating to old tyme music were limited. I could have chosen to work with one individual fiddler and taken a biographical approach. A second option would have been to study old tyme music in the context of the old tyme dances held in Edmonton, Alberta. Lastly, and the fieldwork domain that I chose was to study old tyme music in the setting of the jam session held each week by the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association.

After attending this club for over a year, my approach to this study has changed dramatically. Initially, I thought that I would enter into a

project that focused on three of the club's members, looking at the club through their eyes and their motivations for joining this group. However, as time passed I began to see a pattern arising out of the social aspects of the club. Through observation of the interactions between the members of the club I formed an idea that the club appeared to re-create the social bonds found within rural communities. Since nearly all the members were at one time from small, rural communities it seemed justifiable to consider using this hypothesis.

My personal reasons for choosing this fieldwork domain arose out of my love of Irish folk music. Although old tyme music has no connection to Irish music, it has elements that are similar, the fiddle being the primary instrument in both traditions. I also chose this field of study because old tyme music is in danger of dying out and its practitioners are a vanishing breed. The main goal of the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association is to promote and preserve old tyme music. It is my hope that this study will help bring the club closer to their goal.

Since March 1996 the club has held a jam session once a week at Millhurst Community Hall. This hall is used by the community league for various social activities but they rent it out to other clubs on certain nights. The Wild Rose Association is one of these groups allowed to use it for free. The Wild Rose club in turn decided to give the members of Millhurst Community League a discount on the admission to the jams.

This has changed the club considerably. There are now not only the musicians but a large number of spectators, mostly women, who attend.

The club was originally created to raise funds for fiddling contests and to promote and preserve old tyme fiddling music. The club began in 1989 as a jam session in a member's house and progressed to holding weekly jams and monthly dances in public venues. Today, twenty to thirty people regularly attend the jam sessions, and the numbers have totalled as high as fifty. The management of the club consists of both formal and informal structures. Officially the club has an executive consisting of a president, vice-president, treasurer and secretary. The president and vice-president decide where the dances are to be held and look after promotion, and future direction. The treasurer handles the financial affairs of the club, depositing the money collected at the jam sessions and dances, paying bills, etc. The secretary takes care of keeping the minutes at all the official meetings of the club.

The formal structure is not readily apparent when watching and observing the jam sessions and dances. It is only when the club holds a general meeting that this structure is visible. Decisions are communal; each person has the right to voice their opinion. In addition, all the members help run the jam sessions and dances and aid with the cleanup after each event.

Jam Sessions: Structure & Function Within the Club

The club originally held its jam sessions in a community hall called Paul Kane House in 1989 in Edmonton. As the club grew in size they were forced to move locations from Paul Kane House, to Fiddler's Roost in 1994 (a basement room under an IGA grocery store rented for the jams), to Eastglen High School in 1995 and to its current location at the Millhurst Community Hall in 1996.

The jam sessions are intended to be a place where people meet and join in the music, or just listen. Different styles are encouraged, although it is primarily old tyme music that is played. Even though it is called a fiddling club, there are more instrumentalists who are not fiddlers, among them players of guitar, bass, banjo, harmonica, accordion and spoons. For example, over a period of a month I traced the ratio of fiddles versus other instruments and the ratios at each session were: four fiddles to eight other instruments; four to nine; ten to fourteen; and ten to eighteen.

Most of the musicians that attend this club either compete at fiddle contests or attend them. The club co-sponsors the Grand North American Old Tyme Fiddle Championships held in Edmonton during Klondike Days, a week long festival devoted to celebrating the gold-rush era. These highly competitive events stand in marked contrast to the weekly jam sessions which provide a place where the fiddlers learn new tunes, get help with technique, receive support and encouragement and "chew the

fat". The more advanced fiddlers are always willing to help out beginners at the jams. There is an atmosphere of encouragement and support in the club, and regardless of the level of the musicians, they are treated as equals.

The format of the jam sessions is informal. However, the participants adhere to unspoken rules. A nominal fee of two dollars is charged to attend the sessions. The physical layout consists of wooden chairs arranged in a circle with an additional two chairs located outside the circle on which two amplifiers are placed. One amplifier is used for the electric bass and the other is used for two microphones. A table behind the circle supports the soundboard and other electrical equipment. These microphones are passed around and each performer takes a turn at leading and choosing a song. The audience sits behind the circle with the chairs usually framing the walls. However, when there is a large turnout they are sometimes in rows facing the musicians.

The format of the jam sessions consists of each musician playing only one song. I remember one specific incident when a newcomer played two in a row and the rest of the musicians looked uncomfortable or annoyed. One interesting thing to note is that only the fiddlers, harmonica players and accordionists choose and lead the songs. Very rarely does a guitar player or pianist lead a piece. This has to do with the culture of old tyme music discussed in chapter two. As to the type of

music played, old tyme predominates, but at most every jam one will hear a tune from at least one of the following traditions: Maritime fiddle music, bluegrass, country, Irish, Scottish or French-Canadian music.

At the jam sessions all the tunes are played by ear. When it is the person's turn to lead a song they either call out the key that the song is in or they play a few bars and someone will tell them the key in which the piece is being played. Then the leader starts the piece and everyone begins to play, watching the leader.

Without the burden of looking at a piece of music while they play, the musicians are free to interact with one another and to watch what each player is doing. I noticed that this creates a relaxing atmosphere for the musicians. Because they do not have to stare at a sheet of music, they joke with one another and encourage each other while they are playing. Instead of isolating them as individuals playing together as in classical music, old tyme music links the musicians together fostering a real sense of closeness and community. Having played in a number of concert bands and informal groups similar to this one, I have noticed that there is a stronger sense of community amongst the informal groups. Perhaps one of the reasons for this contradiction is the fact that there is no sheet music to separate musicians from each other

While all this is taking place within the circle of musicians, there is another realm to the jam session, the audience. The audience consists

mostly of women, with the average age being mid-fifties. Some of the women are wives of the musicians, others are members of the Millhurst Community League and the rest have heard about the club through seniors' newspapers/publications and centers. While the music is playing some of the audience are quiet and listen intently, tapping their foot to the rhythm of the music. Others alternate between listening and talking, while still others listen and do some sort of craft such as knitting or sewing. Their discussions revolve around anything and are not limited to the club and its music.

Much of my information about the club has come from observing, listening and talking to the audience members. Once in a while some of the audience will get up and dance to a tune. In addition, the audience is allowed to make requests which are usually filled promptly. I have observed that the number of people in the audience has increased greatly since moving to their present location, and consequently, the musicians seem to be more lively and the music more enthusiastic. This observation is related to the old tyme music culture discussed in chapter two.

Activities: How The Club Achieves Its Goals

The Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association is active throughout the calendar year. The jam sessions continue all year round, occurring once a week on Thursday evenings from 7:30 p.m. until 10:00 p.m. Most

often there is a dance held on the first Friday of each month at Athlone Hall, a community hall in Edmonton rented out to different community organizations. In the month of December there is a special Christmas potluck held before the monthly dance. In addition, a New Year's dinner and dance is sponsored by the club. In June a few contests are held around Alberta in which many of the members take part in or attend. July and August are extremely busy months for club members. Not only do they continue the regular jam sessions and dances, they also participate in fiddle camps and contests held throughout Alberta.

Throughout the year the club members engage in a number of volunteer activities and also paid performances. These consist of playing at the Farmer's Market in Old Strathcona in Edmonton (an indoor market that sells food, crafts, and plants), performing on a float in the Klondike Days parade, playing a concert in the park on July 1st (celebration of Canada Day), and running public dances each month. In addition they also help out the Alberta Society of Fiddlers, (a organization that produces a newsletter designed to promote old tyme fiddling in Alberta) by donating the proceeds of one of their dances to the society.

Numerous discussions with different members of the club, both musicians and non-musicians, lead me to understand the club's purposes. These members told me that first and foremost the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association exists to promote old tyme fiddling music and to

create an atmosphere in which it can flourish. Beyond this there are many different and conflicting ideas as to what the club's direction and purpose should be. Most of the club's activities are oriented to the intent of promoting old tyme music. I was told by a number of members that each year the club tries to sponsor fiddle contests in Alberta and they also give a scholarship to a promising young fiddler to go to a fiddle contest outside of Alberta.

There are many future directions that the club members have told me they want to take, although not all agree on each idea. One of the main things they want to do is to try to get younger people interested and involved in old tyme music. According to the club members, without the interest of the youth, there will be no one left to continue the old tyme music tradition. The fiddlers are aware of this and diligently attempt to revive interest. One idea is to get together a bursary for the top young fiddler in a junior class contest to pay for lessons with accomplished fiddlers. Another idea is to allow different styles to flourish within the club so that the younger people will not feel limited to only one style.

Part of this openness to different styles may stem from the Celtic revival that is now taking place in Canada, lead by Ashley MacIssac, a young Nova Scotia fiddler. The notion of getting a group together consisting mainly of students ranging from elementary up to university

and bringing in a teacher in different areas such as Irish, old tyme, etc., is another possible means of peaking the interest of the youth.

In addition, there has been talk of producing a tape of old tyme music by the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association. Currently there has been a change of the entire executive (October 1996) so future directions of the club must fall into their hands. As of January 1997 it appears that the making of the tape has been put on hold.

Field Research: Methods of Investigation

My involvement with the club includes attending their weekly jam sessions and occasionally the dances. I have been going to the club since September of 1995 and presently attend when I am able. Initiating field research with this club was somewhat more difficult than I expected. The first night I attended I was a visible minority on two counts: first, not only was I aware that I was the only woman but that I was also by far the youngest person there. Second, besides myself there were only two or three other people there listening, the rest were musicians. Thankfully I had not come alone but had brought a male friend (now husband) with me at the suggestion of my advisor. This proved later to be wise; initially the men talked only to my friend and appeared uneasy around me.

I continued to attend every week, and gradually became acquainted with many of the club's members. My initial contact was with the

president of the club. After about three weeks of going to the jam sessions I approached the president and told him of my desire to study the club and to write a thesis on it. He gave his wholehearted approval and so I continued with my observation. My field techniques up to this point included taking fieldnotes, observation and participant observation (I brought my flute to the club). In addition I made audio and video tapes of the jam sessions.

Although I did not continue to bring my flute to the jam sessions (due to an injury that prevents me from playing) my initial participant observation proved to be valuable. I did play and take my turn at the jam sessions. I believe that by moving from the realm of the observer to the domain of the musicians helped my integration in the club. Also, I better realized the feeling of encouragement and acceptance, regardless of talent, found within this circle of musicians. This was very evident to me after I had played my first tune both hesitantly and weakly.

My participation and observations led to several questions as I started interviewing a number of people. I began with one of the fiddlers who had been involved with the club since its inception. I then interviewed the president, a harmonica player, and then one of the youngest fiddlers. These early interviews proved to be extremely valuable not only for the information they provided but also for helping to integrate

me into the club, moving me from the realm of the outsider to the realm of the insider.

I have also conducted many informal interviews, mostly consisting of chatting to members of the club or to the people that attend the dances. Informal interviews have proven to be the most effective tool of gathering data for this study. They have consistently provided me with glimpses into the culture of old-time fiddling and more specifically of the innerworkings of the club. It was through these glimpses that I began to see that this club was really a small community or subculture unto itself. This idea of the fiddling club being a subculture became the focus of my thesis; the study of small, recreational groups as individual communities discussed in chapter three.

Throughout the progression of my fieldwork it became clear that the level of commitment required to respect the social nature of the club was of foremost importance. In order to honor this commitment I had to adapt my oral sources so that they would not violate the privacy of the social dimensions in the club.

In addition to the oral sources of formal and informal interviews I also used information gathered from conversations among the club members and from observations I recorded in my fieldnotes. The knowledge I acquired from these conversations and from my fieldnotes is build into the body of my text. Within these sections I have not credited

one specific person, but have cited the information as "Fieldnotes, December 9," etc. I have chosen to identify the information I acquired from oral sources in a number of ways. First, to respect the privacy of the social and personal interactions in the club and the relation of trust between myself and the club members, I have kept my consultant's name anonymous, unless they have requested otherwise, in all formal interviews and have designated them as "Club Member 1," etc. Second, I removed all names from the information cited from interviews, conversations, and fieldnotes and replaced them with "A, B, C," etc. Third, where a description of the club referred to specific members and it was obvious whom the club member was depicting, I either edited out that particular section or I revised it in such a way that it was not evident who was being described.

Club Members: The Role of Gender within the Association

As mentioned previously the majority of the club's members are men and the average age is from mid-fifties to early sixties. Initially this association seemed to function as an old boy's club, a place where there was the common bond of an interest in old tyme music, but on another level it provided an outlet for these men to come together and socialize.

When I first attended the club I was one of the only women there, except for occasionally when one or two of the wives came to watch. I was

worried at first that my presence at the jam sessions was disturbing some of the members. It was clear that not very many women attended the club and I thought that this made the club members uncomfortable. Later I realized that while that may have been part of the reason, it was mainly because I was a researcher. However, as I continued to go to the jams this uneasiness between myself and the members gradually wore off. In fact, the longer that I attended the club, the more open everybody was to my doing research with the club. It is not unusual to have someone come up to me at the jam sessions to ask me about my thesis. I believe that practically everyone who attends the club knows exactly what I am doing and if they are new, they very quickly seem to find out my agenda.

I believe that my gender did affect how I was perceived and accepted into the club. Although the members did not initially appear to be as comfortable around me as they were around my male friend it did not hinder my research. In fact I found that being a woman helped my study because the club members were concerned with making me feel welcome. Perhaps their willingness to talk to me and answer my questions arose out of being one of the few women to attend the jam sessions.

Since moving to their present location, Millhurst Community Hall, a large number of women come out to watch and listen each week and the men do not appear to mind, in fact they seem to enjoy it. Some of these

women are the wives of the musicians, but they are far out-numbered by other women who come to enjoy the music. It has been suggested to me that the reason for the sudden increase in the number of women attending the jams has to do with my presence. Although I have considered what impact my presence would have on the club, I can find no evidence to back this idea up. In fact, the increase in women coincided with the club's move to Millhurst. Most of these listeners have heard about the club from its advertisements in seniors' papers and through the Millhurst Community League. I believe that the move to this location is the reason so many women are now coming out to the jams

Chapter One: The Role of Community In Old Tyme Music

Old tyme music originated in rural towns of Canada and the United States. Music served as one of the primary forms of entertainment in these small towns, drawing people together from far away. Since music played such a large part in these societies it is necessary to look at the history of rural towns in Alberta. This chapter will specifically examine the ethnic backgrounds of the first settlers, class distinctions in early twentieth century rural Alberta, and common bonds in the club member's backgrounds.

Club Members: Common Backgrounds Bind Them Together

The ethnic backgrounds of the people who attend the club vary but there is a common bond of rural towns and the working class. I use the term "working class" referring back to its origin in the 1870's when "Canadian cities had...become centres of industrial capitalist production - marked by dynamic factory complexes, shaped by powerful industrialists, and inhabited by a large industrial workforce."[1] By rural town I am referring to a place with a population of under ten thousand people. Oral music was associated with both rural and working class people.

There is a vast amount of literature that deals with music of oral traditions and music of classical or elite traditions. A general description

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[1] Steve Langdon, The Emergence of the Canadian Working Class Movement (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1975), p. 3.

of the two traditions is useful to this study because they are separated according to class and the music of this study belongs to the oral tradition. The oral tradition is often associated with rural people or "the folk," hence the name folk music. It can be both vocal and instrumental. Most of the studies on oral tradition focus on folk songs and neglect the instrumental side of this tradition that requires training. When I talk about oral tradition in reference to old tyme, it is this neglected instrumental phenomenon that I am referring to. The oral tradition originated with the lower classes who were stereotyped as "illiterate" and "uneducated." Although many were uneducated, this image has been shamefully exaggerated. It is this tradition that old tyme music fits into and the people who listen to and play this music. In the early twentieth century the practitioners of oral music tended to be from lower to middle class, and they were either farmers or labourers. They have usually learned to play instrumental music by ear and have a large repertoire of music memorized.

There has often been a conflict between oral music and classical music. In the past, people from the classical music tradition have valued their music over oral traditions. Their attitudes toward oral or folk music were not favourable. In turn people from oral traditions have ignored music from the classical tradition. Most of this debate arose out of class distinctions present in society. Rural society has its lower, middle, upper

class and social outcasts. One important difference however, is that these class distinctions did not play a very large role in rural society.

In his book, Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community, Paul Voisey comments on the social structure of rural communities: "Distinctions based on class, wealth, and other social characteristics played some role in forging the social structure, but local conditions all conspired to render them less important than in the pioneers' home societies."[2] Although he examines a prairie community of the early twentieth century, it is applicable to later rural communities. Voisey suggests that one of the reasons that rural society lacked rigid social stratification was that land was not expensive, allowing more people to own their land and businesses. The middle class predominated because large industries did not come to these small communities. Voisey stresses that in order to see the divisions within rural society one must examine it in terms of wealth:

> The most obvious gap occurred between the totally destitute, whose applications for municipal relief routinely appear in the records of both town and rural municipalities, their numbers greatly swollen in times of depression but always present, and those successful merchants and farmers who drove expensive cars, vacationed frequently and far, and lived in large homes appointed with conveniences and luxuries.[3]

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[2] Paul Voisey, Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p. 201.
[3] Voisey, Vulcan, p. 204.

Difference in personal wealth did not create strong divisions among rural residents. Those who did have wealth were treated by the rest of the population as equal. The one exception to this is that it appears that bankers were ranked as slightly higher than the common person. This equal treatment of individuals fostered a sense of togetherness, of "we're all in the same boat" feeling. This formed strong social bonds within the family and also with neighbours. Unlike today where neighbourhoods are virtually disappearing, people next door are strangers, and where social class divisions are highly evident, these small towns and farming areas provided a society that functioned like a family.[4]

John W. Bennett and Seena B. Kohl remark about the lack of social stratification in rural communities in their book, Settling the Canadian-American West, 1890-1915: "Virtually every author of a rural community study in North America comments on the tendency for the inhabitants of rural neighborhoods and small towns to avoid intergroup conflict, ideological differences, and divisive or competitive activities."[5] Many reasons exist for this apparent harmony of the classes in rural areas as discussed in the following paragraph. Paul Voisey notes that these are

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[4] Voisey, Vulcan, p. 219.
[5] John W. Bennett and Seena B. Kohl, Settling the Canadian-American West, 1890-1915 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 250.

the behavioral patterns of small population groups, where regular face-to-face contact creates an exigency for at least the appearance of amity.[6]

In rural communities there are also cultural reasons for avoiding conflict and, specifically, socio-economic class resentments. In the early years of settling western Canada, the population was concerned with basic survival. Most people faced an identical situation, poor, trying to construct a house, working to put food on the table and building a life for themselves. This common bond between the people fostered a sense of togetherness and promoted helping each other regardless of class or ethnic background. These hardships forced people to ignore and avoid conflict.[7]

In later years after communities had become established the focus shifted from survival to community. The population was now concerned with promoting and bettering the community, such as building new roads and schools. This created a shared goal for the people, something to work towards together. Again, in order to do this successfully it was imperative that conflict and class resentments be kept at a minimum.[8]

Ethnicity also played an important part in the settling of western Canada. As will be discussed in the following section, individuals from

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[6] Paul Voisey, Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), pp. 237-238.
[7] John W. Bennett and Seena B. Kohl, Settling the Canadian-American West, 1890-1915 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 251.
[8] Bennett and Kohl, Canadian-American West, pp.250-251.

many different ethnic groups chose to emigrate to Canada. However, in predominantly English-speaking settlements there were few foreign-language settlers, many of whom were North Western Europeans who readily adjusted to Anglo-Canadian culture. It is these settlements that were the main source of old tyme music, rather than single foreign-language ethnic settlements. Consequently, there was a sense of togetherness and little or no discrimination on a personal level. The description of the homestead frontier was "...characterized by a remarkable disposition to level differences between neighbors and friends, even when the population was polyglot."[9] The reason for this apparent lack of separation between different groups was due to the circumstances of the time, and the struggle for mere survival. In such difficult conditions people usually tended to help one another.

Settlement: the Ethnic Mosaic of Early Rural Alberta

In this section I will focus on the difference between immigrants, recent immigrants and those native to Alberta. To comprehend fully how each of these groups came to be it is useful to look at the settling of the province of Alberta. Alberta is a vast mix of people. Immigration was extremely important to Alberta. It contributed most heavily to the provincial population in the period of 1900-1914. Originally, Alberta was populated by a variety of diverse native cultures. The culture of the Métis

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[9] Bennett and Kohl, Canadian-American West, p. 33.

created a distinct economic role and way of life in the nineteenth century West, that was neither European nor Indian, but a complex mixture of each. The Métis played an important role in nineteenth century fur trade society.[10] In addition, old tyme music was also found in the communities of the Métis.

During the 1880's a number of male settlers came from Ontario. Also at this time came the British and Americans who outnumbered the Ontario settlers. In the 1870's the Canadian government encouraged the emigration of Russian Mennonites, Icelanders, Americans, Russian Jews, Hungarians and Germans. One of the largest American groups to come to Western Canada were the Mormons from Utah. During World War I another German-speaking group came to Alberta, the Hutterites. In addition, more people emigrated from central and eastern Europe, but the largest group of these immigrants were the Ukrainians. Following the Ukrainians came the Poles and the Romanians.

Immigrants also came to Alberta from Hungary, Bohemia, Slovakia, Russia in addition to minority groups such as Byelorussians, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Jews and Doukhobors. After the turn of the century three small Mediterranean groups came to Alberta, the Greeks, Arabs and Italians. Also, a small number of immigrants from

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[10] Gerhard J. Ens, Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Metis in the Nineteenth Century (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), pp. 12-19.

China and Japan came to the West. However, by 1920 the largest groups established in Alberta were the British, Americans, Eastern Canadians, Germans, Scandinavians, Ukrainians, and the French.[11]

At the beginning of the twentieth century there was an uncertainty over what was a "native" Canadian. The distinction between "foreign-born" and "native" were especially vague between the United States and Canada. For example, a person born in Canada who moved back and forth across the border in search of a suitable home could have been counted as either "foreign" or "native" depending on where they were during enumeration. The result is that Census of Canada showed a large proportion of "foreign born" people, but many of these were people born in the United States.[12]

Each of the three people I formally interviewed came from small towns and a large number of people that I talked to informally came from rural communities, mostly in Alberta and British Columbia, but some in other provinces or Europe.

The distinction between recent immigrants versus born-and-bred Albertans is necessary to understand where the Wild Rose members fall in terms of being Canadian or immigrant. To begin with, nearly all the

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[11] Howard and Tamara Palmer, Peoples of Alberta: Portraits of Cultural Diversity, (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1985), pp. 21-27.
[12] John W. Bennett and Seena B. Kohl, Settling the Canadian-American West, 1890-1915 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 31.

members of the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association are born-and-bred Albertans, however this does not mean that they did not come from a specific ethnic background such as German. What I mean by this phrase is that these people were born, raised, and have remained in Alberta. Recent immigrants in this paper refers to people who were not born or raised in Alberta but have recently arrived from another country.

Most of the members' parents were from Alberta and have lived here all their lives. A few of their parents were not born in Alberta. Some of the fiddlers are second generation Albertans and their grandparents came from another part of Canada or another country. Most prominent in this category are Ukrainian, Scottish, French and German people. In their book, Peoples of Alberta: Portraits of Cultural Diversity, Howard and Tamara Palmer examine the heritage of Alberta and the eighty different ethnic groups which settled it. They state that "At the turn of the century, many rural regions of the province were settled predominantly by one ethnic group."[13] All of these ethnic backgrounds helped to build and shape life in rural town Alberta. This is the timeframe and background that the club's member's families or themselves grew up in.

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[13] Howard and Tamara Palmer, Peoples of Alberta: Portraits of Cultural Diversity, (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1985), p. x.

Old tyme music and fiddle culture appear to have been present in most rural Albertan communities. Many club members were familiar with fiddle music at an early age, growing up with it, listening to it and playing it. Many of the club's members learned to play by ear listening to records or live musicians and then trying to figure it out themselves. Only a handful learned to play their instrument through reading music rather than playing by ear. These same few people have taken formal lessons and it shows in their posture and the way that they hold their instruments.

Club Members: Common Bonds in Backgrounds

A common theme in the backgrounds of club members is that instrumental music played an important part in the small towns in which they grew up. Instrumental music served as one of the main sources of entertainment. Most of the members of the club are not from the generation where old tyme dances were a major social event. These dances figured prominently in the lives of their parents and grandparents. Club members have been exposed to old tyme music while growing up whether played live or heard in the home from records, radio and television. Many of the members' parents or close relatives were musicians. For example, one of the club members discusses his initial contact with old tyme music:

> I have been listening to old time fiddle music as far back as the cradle. My parents' house was always filled with the sounds of Don Messer, Ned Landry, Ti-Blanc Richard to name a few. I remember waking up in the mornings for school to the sweet sounds of fiddle music.[14]

Another way the members were exposed to old tyme music was through gatherings on special occasions. In small, rural towns of that era it was common practice to go over to someone's house to socialize on special occasions like Christmas. Someone would pull out a guitar or fiddle and would play popular folk songs, heavily influenced by old tyme, or old tyme tunes themselves. Since then, musical tastes and practices have changed, resulting in far less contact with old tyme music.

One last element that serves as a bond for the club members is that most are rural or working class people. Most of the club's members fall into the working class being factory workers or labourers. Only a few of the members would fit under the classification of white collar workers. By this term I mean those people who work as businessmen, managers, in skilled professional trades, and specialized tradespeople.[15]

A shared background as part of the working class provides the members with common ground for association. Not only can they relate to each other through their love of old tyme music, but they also operate on

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[14] Club Member, Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association Newsletter October 1996 (Edmonton: Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association, 1996), p. 1.

[15] Conrad M. Arensberg and Solon T. Kimball, Culture and Community (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1965), p. 171.

the same level of society. A further extension of this bond of the same class carries over into the types of entertainment activities enjoyed. Discussion with members reveals that they enjoy similar recreational activities such as camping, dancing, travelling and of course, music. Again, these common interests further strengthen the bonds found within this club.

Chapter Two - History of Old Tyme Music and Old Tyme Music Culture

> *We were playing in a hall where they had centre posts to hold up the ceiling. Well, there was such a crowd that the floor sagged and the posts fell out. But they kept on dancing and we kept on playing. And some of those fellows picked up the huge beams and threw them right out the windows. [1934]*[16]

This quote by Don Messer, a well-known Maritime fiddler, is a fitting description of old tyme dances. It shows the importance of this music as a form of entertainment to people throughout Canada and the United States. This willingness to do almost anything in order to both attend and keep the dance going was a common attitude amongst people in the early twentieth century. This chapter will cover the history of the instruments and music that is the heart of old tyme, namely the fiddle.

Origins & Identity: The Beginnings of Old Tyme Fiddle Music

Fiddling is one of the oldest and most common folk music forms in the United States, Canada, the British Isles and Europe. Folk instruments of the fiddle type existed in many early cultures, dating back to the medieval period. The fiddle as we now know it has existed since the sixteenth century. Canadian and American fiddles were primarily brought from Ireland, Scotland and England. As these immigrants settled into different areas of North America, regional variations developed. In Canada, styles have developed which are distinct to certain

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[16] Lester B. Sellick, Canada's Don Messer (Kentville, Nova Scotia: Kentville Publishing Co., Ltd, 1969), p. 25.

provinces. In the Eastern provinces a Maritime style developed which is heavily influenced by Irish and Scottish folk music. Ontario tends to be a mix of both the British influence and old tyme music. Quebec exhibits a French-Canadian and Métis style of fiddling. The provinces of Western Canada show eastern European influences as well as old tyme music.

While most of the above-mentioned styles can be traced to an ethnic group, old tyme music is not associated with one specific ethnic group. It is partially due to this fact that it is difficult to say exactly what old tyme music is since it has not been written about that widely. Also, within the community of users there is an overlap of labels. These labels are contingent on the particular group, context and situation. Depending upon who is speaking, and where they are located, the label of old tyme music can also refer to country music, folk music, etc. It is because of the overlap of these labels that it becomes difficult to designate old tyme with one definition. The best explication of old tyme is a music originating in rural areas throughout the United States and Canada.

Although old tyme traditions that developed in the United States had similar roots as in Canada there are differences that warrant separating the history of both. In the U.S.A., old tyme or "hillbilly" music originated in the mountains of Appalachia, reaching across the states of Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky and North Carolina. Nick Barraclough states that: "This music has long been a symbol of rural America, and it

was from these fiddle and banjo tunes that country music developed."[17] The people that made this music were generally poor whites who lived in poverty and isolation. When these people migrated to the cities to look for work they were nicknamed "hillbillies" which was transferred to their style of music. Their music has been passed down as the following generations were exposed to and learned this musical tradition from close relations.

One main difference between Canadian and American old tyme music is that the American tradition relied extensively on vocals rather than instruments. It was the lyrics of hillbilly music that attracted record companies in the 1920's to record hundreds of regional performers. This interest in recording hillbilly musicians helped to disseminate the music across the country and beyond. Some various studies on hillbilly music or old tyme music in the United States include Joyce H. Cauthen's book, With Fiddle and Well Rosined Bow: Old-Time Fiddling in Alabama, (1989) and Linda C. Burman-Hall's article, "Southern American Folk Fiddle Styles," (1975.)

As the sales of hillbilly music rose the record companies decided to rename hillbilly music as "old-time" or "old-timey" in the early 1920's. It is not clear when the numerous spellings of "old time" came into use. The

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[17] Nick Barraclough, "Appalachian Swing: Old-Time and Bluegrass," in World Music, The Rough Guide, ed. Simon Broughton, Mark Ellingham, David Muddyman and Richard Trillo, (London: Rough Guides Ltd., 1994), p. 602.

spelling the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's use is commonly employed when one wants something to sound "old." The term "hillbilly" music was avoided due to the negative connotations originally associated with the word.

Some of the first and most popular American artists to be recorded in the early 1920's were the Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers. The Carter family were first recorded in 1927 and combined clear vocals with complementary instrumentation. Their group consisted of guitar, autoharp, fiddle and vocals and it had a great influence on the instrumentation of country music. The same year, Jimmie Rodgers, another well-known old tyme musician was recorded. He wrote songs which incorporated instrumental elements of blues and old tyme. His legacy had a tremendous impact not just on country music, but on rock, pop, swing and big band. These genres were influenced both by his vocal style and instrumental arrangements.[18]

Gradually old tyme music began to disappear from the recording scene. Even though it was no longer in the public eye, old tyme music was still practiced in rural areas of Canada and the United States. The number of practitioners did decrease however, it remained alive in the rural communities. Old tyme music may have continued to be ignored by the recording scene if it were not for the folk revivals of the 1950's and the

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[18] Barraclough, World Music, pp. 602-603.

1960's. During this period much of the old tyme music that was recorded by commercial labels in the 1920's was reissued, legendary artists were rediscovered, and previously unheard exponents of the old tyme tradition were likewise found and brought to perform at folk festivals.[19] The result of these folk revivals was a renewed interest in old tyme music which in turn brought out many old tyme fiddlers who had not played publicly, or even privately in years.

In addition, a number of new groups entered this old time revival. They attempted to stick to the original hillbilly style and promote American folk music. One such group was the New Lost City Ramblers. This group tried to adhere to the traditional hillbilly sound with the intention of promoting it as "original" folk music, or the way it had been before radio and TV had begun to homogenize the regional sounds. They accomplished their task and succeeded in bringing hillbilly music back into the forefront both in terms of the number of records sold and the large audiences.

With the revival of old time music it became increasingly confused with country and western music. Old tyme was actually the predecessor to country and western music. One of the main differences between country and western music and old tyme is that old tyme music was

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[19] Steve Goldfield, "Old-Time Music." August 1995. Online Posting. rec.music.country.old-time. Available HTTP: http://www.rec.music.country.old-time, p. 3.

primarily instrumental whereas country and western focused on the vocals. There are similarities in the instrumental side of these musics, since both originate in rural areas and employ many of the same instruments.

Perhaps one of the reasons country and western music has remained on the forefront of the music scene is that it is written down. Old tyme music like country music is from an oral tradition but unlike country music it was not written down much, but was and is still played from and learned by memory. Since the mode of transmission for old tyme music is found in the hands of its practitioners, its survival depends on oral maintenance and transmission.

Old tyme music still exists today in the United States as it does in Canada. There are numerous folk festivals, fiddle contests and jamborees devoted exclusively to this genre. As well, there are clubs, such as the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association that help to keep the tradition of music-making alive.

Dissemination: The Role Of Record Companies & Broadcast Media

It was the American record companies that coined the term "old time" music in the 1920's which was also known as hillbilly music, marking the importance of radio and recording to old tyme music. It is not clear how many people owned gramophone players, however from my

interviews I have found that many people did listen to and play old tyme records in the 1920's and 1930's. Radio played an important role in the history of old tyme music by both disseminating old tyme recordings and making this music accessible to a greater number of people. Radio began to be recognized as a valid form of communication in the 1920's. By the late 1920's most wealthy Canadians had radios and were listening to American stations.

Canadian radio was not widely listened to until the broadcasting of live hockey games. The broadcasting of hockey "...convinced Canadians to listen to their radio stations...in Canada there were not as many movie houses available to a widely scattered population, and so Canadians stayed home to listen to the radio."[20] This had an impact on old tyme music because Canadians now listened to Canadian old tyme via the radio. By the 1930's and 40's, most Canadians were able to listen to the radio. These radio stations transmitted recordings, both live and taped, of old tyme music to the rural areas of Canada. This increased both the accessibility and popularity of old tyme music.

Canadian radio did not come to the forefront until the beginning of W.W.II, at which time American radio broadcasting was still preferred by Canadian listeners. "The Grand Ole Opry," and similar country and

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[20] Sandy Stewart, From Coast to Coast: A Personal History of Radio in Canada (Toronto: CBC Enterprises/Les Entreprises Radio-Canada, 1985), p. 19.

western shows were the most popular ones related to old tyme music. In the 1930's Canadian radio tried to imitate these US programs including "George Wade and His Cornhuskers," "Bert Anstice and His Mountain Boys," and "The Singing Lumberjacks" featuring Charlie Chamberlain and the Don Messer Orchestra, from which "Don Messer and His Islanders" evolved.[21] Each of these groups had an influence on helping to spread old tyme music throughout the country

Radio began to decline in the 1950's with the arrival of television, "In 1956 more than 80 percent of Canadians were within range of a television station."[22] It was somewhat later, in the early 1960's that rural populations had access to television. The rising popularity of television worked together with radio to promote old tyme music. There were a number of programs that focused on old tyme music such as the Don Messer Show.

Don Messer was one of the first fiddlers to be recorded and gain national status. Like many other fiddlers, Messer started playing the fiddle at a very young age, five years old. As he entered his teens he found himself in demand for private functions: "In the evenings there was time to visit around among the small towns and villages. Don found himself back at his old game - playing at dances and at parties in private

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[21] Stewart, From Coast to Coast, pp. 45-47.
[22] Stewart, From Coast to Coast, p. 153.

homes."[23] His first broadcast over the radio was a local station around 1930. He became gained national status with his group the "Islanders" in the early 1940's. In the 1920's and 1930's old tyme music began to be recorded by record companies. Messer recalls the reception his musical group received from each town when they travelled to play for various radio stations:

> Meanwhile the radio programs were reaching into the far corners of the country and when we arrived at each spot we received a warm welcome. We even dipped down into the States...We played at night clubs in Boston, New York, Hartford, and even went to New Jersey for special events. We were on several radio programs [1934].[24]

Old tyme music was the popular music of the 1920's and 1930's on the radio in rural communities of Canada and the United States. Although old tyme music mostly disappeared from the larger radio shows in the 1950's and 1960's it still remained alive in the smaller rural towns, largely with the help of television.[25]

The Repertoire of Old Tyme Music: A Musical Example

It is 9:30 pm on a Thursday evening; the jam session is now half over. Club Member 1, a well-known dance fiddler, is tuning his fiddle and playing a phrase of music. Both the musicians and the audience are

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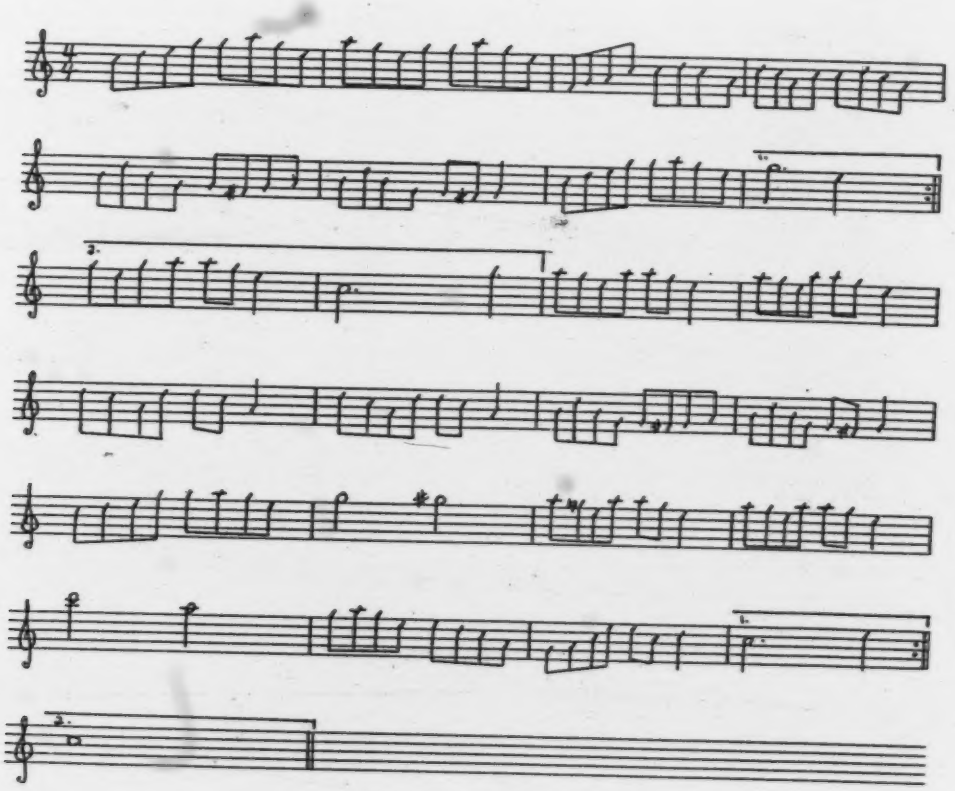
[23] Lester B. Sellick, Canada's Don Messer (Kentville, Nova Scotia: Kentville Publishing Co., Ltd., 1969), p. 21.
[24] Sellick, Don Messer, p. 25.
[25] Steve Goldfield, "Old-Time Music." August 1995. Online Posting. rec.music.country.old-time. Available HTTP: http://www.rec.music.country.old-time, pp. 1-2.

animatedly talking, waiting for the fiddler to begin. After tuning his fiddle, he begins to play "Oscar Stone's Rag," a familiar tune that is heard at every jam session and dance. Gradually the other instruments join in to accompany him. The tune he plays is fast and lively, and has the feel of a swing piece. Two couples are attempting to dance a fox-trot around the little hall. The piano provides a chordal backup that is reminiscent of a ragtime style. There is a walking bass line that further enhances the lively time of the tune. Meanwhile the fiddler elaborates the plain tune, adding accents and additional notes to inject his personal style into the tune. Gradually he begins to play louder until he finishes by repeating the last note. There is thunderous applause and laughter.

"Oscar Stone's Rag" is a favourite among old tyme music-makers, one of a number of tunes that are performed at every Wild Rose jam session. It is a standard among old tyme players and most of the members know it by heart. A brief analysis of this typical piece will provide a clearer understanding of what characterizes the old tyme sound.

The following example is what my consultants call a "note-by-note" version of "Oscar Stone's Rag." This is a generic version that would normally be played by a beginning fiddler, or like myself, someone who is not familiar with the old tyme music genre.

Musical Example One: "Note-by-Note" Version of "Oscar Stone's Rag"

The example of "Oscar Stone's Rag" would very rarely be played the way it appears here. When I played this piece at one of the jams exactly as it is written in example one, the fiddlers told me it was good, but I needed to add some of my own interpretations into the tune. By this they meant that each individual musician elaborates on the "note-by-note"

melody. For example, I have written the form as A A B B, the fiddlers will often not adhere to this format and may perform it as A B A B. In addition, the tune is in 4/4 time. However, it is not a strict 4/4, but is played in a swing tempo, holding the first and the third beats slightly longer. More important, the fiddler will always add grace notes and accents which are integral to the old tyme sound. In one of my interviews my consultant said that:

> Any fiddler that plays by ear always puts his own stuff in. If you were to play by note it would be the saddest sounding stuff there is. I've listened to ones play by note, note for note and it doesn't sound good, not to me anyway.[26]

This negative view of playing note-by-note is one that is held by most old tyme players. According to the club members it is what the fiddler adds to the bare tune that makes it old tyme. The following musical example is the same as the previous one except that grace notes, accents and tuning are added which characterize the old tyme sound.

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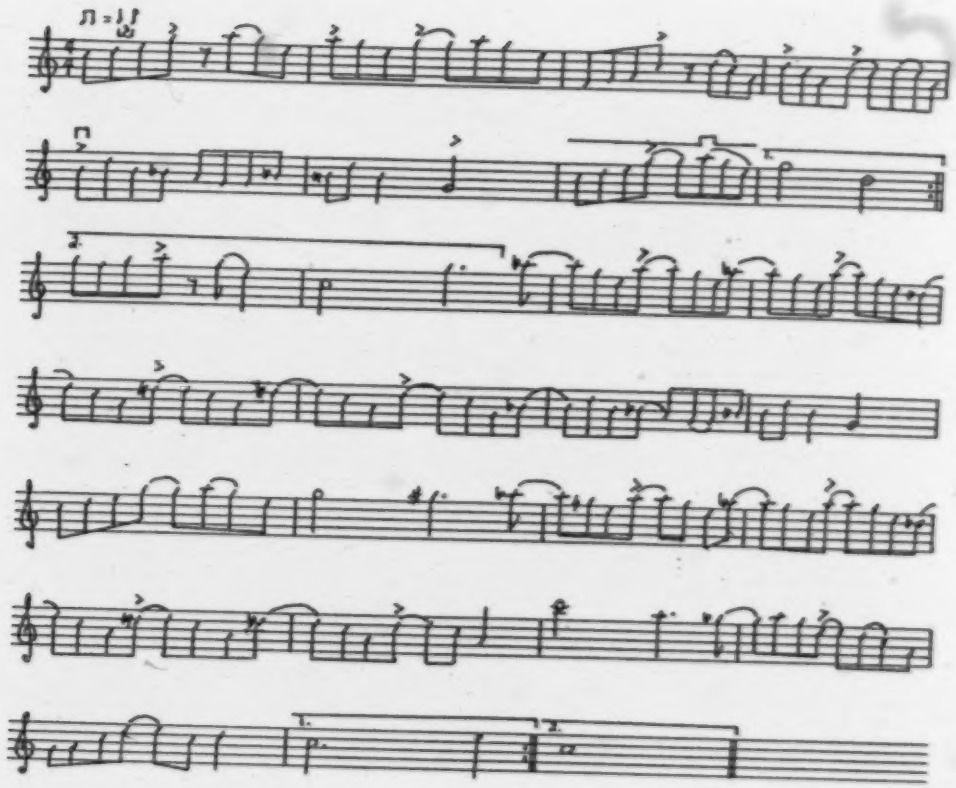
[26] Club Member, Gene Michael, Interview, November 9, 1995.

Musical Example Two: An Old Tyme Fiddler's Interpretation



[27] A special thanks to Rod Olstad who graciously provided this transcription. It is not the original version that I heard, but is his personal interpretation of what he learned and heard from old tyme fiddlers.

A Jam Session: Repertoire of Old Tyme Music

After attending the Wild Rose jam sessions for a number of weeks one can see that many of the tunes are repeated each week. These make up the standard repertoire for the club members because most of them know these tunes by heart. However, these tunes are not written down; they are learned orally, either from another musician or a recording. When the club members take their turn at playing a tune, they rarely name the tune and if asked what it is called, they identify it by composer, the place they heard it or by title. There is not an emphasis placed on knowing the name of the tune each musician plays; the importance is placed on listening and performing with the lead musician.

The following table is an outline of the first hour and a half of a Wild Rose jam session held on December 7, 1995. It shows how many turns each musician has at leading a song throughout the evening and how many musicians attend. It does not show the names of the tunes being performed.

Table One - Chart of Jam Session

Musicians	*Number of Tunes*
Harmonica 1	Tune 7, 8, 19, 20, 31, 32
Harmonica 2	Tune 9, 10, 21, 22, 33,
Accordion	Tune 1, 11, 23, 36
Fiddle 1	Tune 2, 12, 18, 35

Fiddle 2	Tune 5, 13, 24, 34
Fiddle 3	Tune 6, 14, 16, 25
Fiddle 4	Tune 4, 17, 27, 29, 30
Fiddle/Guitar 5	Tune 4, 15, 26, 28
Banjo	Accompanies
Guitar 1	Accompanies
Guitar 2	Accompanies
Bass	Accompanies

Within under two hours, approximately forty songs are played at these jam sessions. The table shows that each musician (disregarding accompanying instruments) leads about four tunes each. The reason some musicians led more tunes than others is because many of the other musicians frequently leave their places throughout the evening to talk to the audience, get a coffee, etc. Also, the they frequently change where they are sitting depending upon how many times people leave their chairs. When initiating a tune the musicians almost never give the title of the piece they are performing or the genre. It is the music that identifies the tune; the musicians have learned the tune orally and it is transmitted this way. The name of the tune is not important to the musicians because the music is its name. For a representative recording of standard old tyme tunes please refer to my videotape and audiotape of

the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association (1995, 1996) in the Centre For Ethnomusicology, University of Alberta in Edmonton. In addition, there are a number of commercial recordings such as Athabasca Old-Time Fiddling (1984) by the Institute of Alaskan Native Arts or The Great Canadian Fiddle (1976) by Springwater Publishers.

Instruments: How The Old Tyme Sound Came Into Being

A short history of the primary instruments in old tyme music is helpful to understand fully its history and the people who perform it. The treatment and definition of the term "old tyme" in this study are reconstructions gathered from various sources.

The Core of Old Tyme Music: The Fiddle

To begin with the term fiddle music is analogous to old tyme music involving numerous instruments other than fiddle. The main instrument, the fiddle, has a European background drawn from the various countries. There is evidence that it may have originated in ancient Asia, but this is not known definitively. The playing of the fiddle in Canada dates back to the early days of European settlements.[28] When the instrument was brought to Canada, some of the traditional music associated with it came too. Scottish and Irish fiddling had a profound influence on the

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[28] Flora Matherson Gouldren, Helmut Kallmann, Nancy McGregor and Susan Spier, "Violin," in The Encyclopedia of Music in Canada, 2nd Edition. eds. Helmut Kallmann, Gilles Potvin and Kenneth Winters. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), pp. 1373-1375.

development of fiddle music in Canada. There have been numerous studies done on fiddling derived from these traditions such as Virginia Garrison's Ph.D dissertation on "Traditional and Non-Traditional Teaching and Learning Practices in Folk Music: An Ethnographic Field Study of Cape Breton Fiddling" (1985) and Allister MacGillvray's book The Cape Breton Fiddler, (1981.) French-Canadian and Métis communities developed their own style of fiddling as described by Anne Lederman in her Master's thesis "Old Native and Métis Fiddling in Two Manitoba Communities: Camperville and Ebb and Flow," (1986) and Colin Quigley's article "A French-Canadian Fiddler's Worldview: The Violin is 'Master of the World,'" (1988.) In addition, a wave of immigration in the 1890's brought a number of Eastern Europeans to Canada. Most prominent were the Ukrainians who influenced Anglo-Canadian and Métis dance music on the prairies. Also, fiddle music of other ethnic groups became popular in Canada such as Rumanian, Hungarian, Polish and Icelandic.[29] There are various studies done on these ethnic groups such as "Sounds You Never Before Heard: Ukrainian Country Music in Western Canada," (1972) by B. Klymasz or "Fiddling in Western Manitoba: A Preliminary Report," (1985) by Anne Lederman.

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[29] Anne Lederman, "Fiddling " in The Encyclopedia of Music in Canada, 2nd edition. eds. Helmut Kallmann, Gilles Potvin and Kenneth Winters. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p. 455.

The influence of these different ethnic communities on the development of fiddle music can be seen in the ornamentation and the song structure of old tyme music. Incidentally, the distinction made between "fiddle" and "violin" is based entirely on the genre of music and techniques. The violin is used to play classical music whereas the fiddle plays anything but classical music, such as country, folk, Celtic, etc. The techniques also differ. For example, the violinist holds the instrument parallel to the floor and the fiddler holds it pointing downwards.

The favourite instrument for generations in Canada and the United States was the fiddle. Fiddlers are the heart of old tyme music; without them this tradition would not exist. Documented evidence reveals fiddle contests were held as early as the eighteenth century. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, fiddlers were necessary components of the most important social functions, particularly where dancing occurred.

Steve Goldfield, describes the fiddler as "...a living repository of tradition who imbued venerable tunes with fresh fingerprints..."[30] A good fiddler was highly respected and prized in the community. Matthew G. Guntharp, in his book, Learning the Fiddler's Ways, provides a brief, but insightful description of fiddling:

> Fiddling is a folk art. It is not a fine art cultivated under society's watchful eye. Terms like 'by ear.' 'picked it up,' and 'licks' are typical of the easy and flowing nature of fiddling. We rarely heard

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[30] Steve Goldfield, "Old-Time Music." August 1995. Online Posting. rec.music.country.old-time. Available HTTP: http://www.rec.music.country.old-time, p. 2.

> a fiddler use the term 'violin' except when he was particularly pleased with his instrument.[31]

Different regions and ethnic communities of Canada and the United States had their own unique style. Although it has fallen into decline, old tyme music has not disappeared completely. The fiddle players and their families are keeping alive this tradition. Their music is passed from one generation to the next, shaped by the gradual and ever-changing taste of the listeners and the players. The techniques and styles of old tyme fiddling are timeless and provide a continuity while at the same time allowing change.[32]

Ethnic Influences on Old Tyme Music: The Accompanying Instruments

African-American music has also played a role in the shaping of old tyme music. The banjo, commonly found in old tyme music ensembles, is of African-American origin. It came into the old tyme tradition in the nineteenth century through minstrel and vaudeville shows.[33]

The guitar was first brought to Canada during the middle of the seventeenth century by European immigrants. It was a relative latecomer to old tyme music, surfacing in the late nineteenth century.[34] Rural

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[31] Matthew G. Guntharp, Learning the Fiddler's Ways (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980), p. 19.
[32] Guntharp, Learning, p. 19.
[33] Sibyl Marcuse, Musical Instruments - A Comprehensive Dictionary (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1975), p. 35.
[34] Norma MacSween, "Guitar," in The Encyclopedia of Music in Canada, 2nd edition. eds. Helmut Kallmann, Gilles Potvin and Kenneth Winters. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), pp. 561-562.

musicians purchased guitars through mail order catalogues who made inexpensive mass-produced guitars widely available. The mandolin, an Italian instrument, also entered old tyme tradition by means of order catalogues. In fact, catalogues, particularly Eaton's, provided many people with fiddles, guitars, mandolins and banjos, "At the age of 10, [1907] I used to look at the violins in Eaton's catalogue. I took my spare cash and sent for my first violin."[35]

Accordions were first patented in Austria in 1829. The first accordions produced in Canada date back to around 1865 to 1880. However, most accordions were imported from Germany and Italy. It gained recognition in Canada in the mid 1960's, being popularized in Quebec folk music.[36] Accordions are most commonly used in old tyme polkas played at both dances and jams.

The piano was one of the main accompanying instruments for the old tyme fiddle. Its introduction to old tyme arose out of the fact that a few people had pianos in their homes which made it easily accessible to provide accompaniment. Also, the piano was able to provide chording that few other instruments could render.

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[35] John Andrew Messer, cited in Harold Newlove, ed., Fiddlers of the Canadian West (Regina, Saskatchewan: New Horizons, 1976), p. 149.
[36] Joseph Macerollo, "Accordion," in The Encyclopedia of Music in Canada, 2nd Edition. eds. Helmut Kallmann, Gilles Potvin and Kenneth Winters. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p. 3.

The harmonica was invented in the early 1820's most probably in Germany. This instrument was destined to be important in Canada because of its small size, modest cost, and relative ease of mastery. Due to these attributes it is a popular and practical instrument for children and informal music-making. It was brought into old tyme music through the French-Canadian music tradition and like the accordion comes from the Quebec tradition of folk dance music.[37] In addition, the spoons also entered the old tyme tradition from the French.

All of these instruments shaped old tyme music into the current ensemble.[38] The wide and varied ethnic and commercial background of these instruments demonstrates the idea of the community being linked to old tyme music because different ethnic groups within the community brought something to old tyme music. The Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association ensemble is comprised of fiddles, guitars, banjo, mandolin, spoons, bass, harmonicas, piano and accordions.

Banjo, guitar, and mandolin and other miscellaneous instruments provide what the fiddler would term as "backtime," or accompaniment. According to the old tyme musicians I have talked to and the sheer dominance of its appearance, the guitar seems to be one of the best

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[37] Mark Miller, "Harmonica," in The Encyclopedia of Music in Canada, 2nd edition. eds. Helmut Kallmann, Gilles Potvin and Kenneth Winters. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p. 582.
[38] Steve Goldfield, "Old-Time Music." August 1995. Online Posting. rec.music.country.old-time. Available HTTP: http://rec.music.country.old-time, p. 3.

accompanying instruments because of its rhythmic consistency and ability to sound chording. Besides accompaniment, these instruments help regularize or keep the timing of the fiddlers steady. Unaccompanied old tyme fiddlers tend to play irregularly or in free rhythm, adding measures, tempo changes and intricate endings.

Dance: Stylistic Elements & Significance in Rural Society

Music played a significant role in the families of rural communities, particularly from 1920 to around 1950, when old tyme music was at its height. This was the era before television when there were other pastimes. Most rural residents were not privy to an upbringing where reading was encouraged, so many people turned to music as a leisure activity. Not only did music serve to provide entertainment but it also strengthened the family unit since most members of a family played musical instruments. The family interest in music was in turn essential in preserving and sustaining old tyme music.[39]

One of the most popular forms of entertainment in Alberta towns in the early twentieth century were Saturday night dances. These dances most often took place in community halls or schools (much like Athlone Hall, the community hall where the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association holds their dances). Occasionally dances were held in large

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[39] Matthew G. Guntharp, Learning the Fiddler's Ways (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980), pp. 135-136.

homes where either musicians or records furnished the music. The music varied greatly according to the geographical region and the age of the dancers. Fad dances such as the Charleston were popular with the youth but were looked down upon by the elders. Records show that: "...at the Edmonton 'Old-Timer's Ball' in 1896, the dance programme included the waltz, reels, gallop, jig, schottische, polka, cotillion, reel of eight, and others."[40] Music was usually provided by local musicians who played both regionally and throughout the province. A dance band was often struck on the spot at dances from the available musicians. Incidentally, this is how the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association runs their dances; whoever comes takes a turn in playing.

The term "dance" in the early twentieth century refers primarily to square dancing, step dancing and couple dancing. The name square dance can be misleading since it was not the only dance performed. Three square dances were usually followed by three round dances. The round dances were performed in a circle with couples and included waltzes, schottisches, pattern dances and polkas.[41] To accompany the square dances traditional reels, jigs, hornpipes and occasional popular song airs

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[40] Donald G. Wetherell and Irene Kmet, Useful Pleasures: The Shaping of Leisure in Alberta 1896-1945 (Saskatchewan: Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism/Canadian Plains Research Center, 1990), p. 235.
[41] Lisa Stormer, Fieldnotes November 1995.

were played.[42] For each of these dances there is a specific type of music played with a rhythmic pattern. There are a number of different square dances; for example, the three-change square dance:

> ...consists of three sets of dances performed by four couples who form a hollow square. Dance instructions for each set are announced by a caller. The changes are accompanied by a 6/8 jig; a moderately-paced hornpipe or reel in common time; and a lively breakdown tempo comprised of a hornpipe, reel or hoedown played prestissimo.[43]

Step dancing is done individually and can include just one person on the dance floor or a number of individuals. The step dances are performed to jigs, reels and hornpipes. The couple dances include waltzes, two-steps, fox-trots, polkas, and schottisches. The tune "Stone's Rag" as seen in musical example two would be played for couple dances like the fox-trot.

In the 1930's and 1940's it was very prestigious to be asked to play for a dance and this encouraged young people to learn the fiddle. At these dances the younger fiddle players were always welcome to join the older fiddle players on stage. This served as both a learning and encouraging experience for the young fiddlers. In addition, playing for dances brought the musicians an elevated social status in the community.

In rural areas, these dances were one of the only times that almost everyone in the town got together. For some it was the only time they saw

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[42] For a description of these musical styles such as jigs, reels, etc., please refer to: Dr. Ed Whitcomb, Canadian Fiddle Music Volume 1 (Ottawa: Ed Whitcomb, 1990).

[43] Roy W. Gibbons, As it Comes: Folk Fiddling in Prince George, British Columbia (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1982), p.2.

each other, owing to the pressures of work and the distance between the houses. Rev. Martin W. Holdom, a British minister who came to Alberta in the early twentieth century wrote a letter to his father describing an early form of an old tyme dance.

> I went to my first Canadian dance in the evening. Farmer has just completed his hardware store; they always have a dance in a new store before they move the stock in. I have never been to anything quite so funny in my life. Round the walls on boards placed on upturned barrels sat all the young men in the place (about 70). All these young men were togged up in their best, but that did not mean very much. Most of them had shaved and had a wash (that in itself made a great change), a few had brushed their clothes, and a still smaller number were wearing clean collars. These young men were sitting quite mute and solemn, quite melancholy in fact, watching their twelve luckier brethren prance round with twelve females to the strains of one of the strangest bands I have ever heard. It consisted of two guitars, a coronet, and a flute. This was considered fine, as often they cannot rise to more than a mouth organ.[44]

Although the old tyme dances became one of the most popular forms of entertainment, it was not always that way. Initially dancing was discouraged by certain church groups and was a divisive issue, creating conflicts within families and between neighbours. Gradually dance became accepted and formed one of the most common types of entertainment. This recollection of country dances was found in a local Alberta history book:

> Everyone went to dances which were often held in the school houses in the rural areas or in the assembly halls in the two towns.

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[44] Paul Voisey, ed. A Preacher's Frontier: The Castor, Alberta Letters of Rev. Martin W. Holdom, 1909-1912 (Calgary, AB: The Historical Society of Alberta, 1996), pp. 18-19.

> Babysitting was no problem as the whole family went to the dance. Coats were stacked high on the benches and as the dance progressed, babies and smaller children were stacked on top of the coats to sleep. Country dances were a mixture of the various ethnic groups that were represented with square dancing the most popular...We would go for miles to attend a dance.[45]

Dances served to cut across the differences between generations, ethnic groups, ranchers, farmers, townsmen, and country people, reinforcing relationships as well as relieving the stress of work. In retrospect, these relationships provided the foundation for re-created meanings of community life in the reminiscences and local histories.[46]

Not only did dances serve as one of the favourite types of leisure activities but they helped to create and build relationships that otherwise may not have formed due to the distance between neighbours.

> The barn dances, that drew young people from far and near together, naturally attracted...as when a dancing couple held hands assisting each other down the barn ladder, then went on a moon-lit stroll. The word was said as they embraced and kissed...And the smiling moon shone down with a shine of approval for a resourceful and ethnic-mixed marriage...a culture enhancement for America![approx. 1930][47]

Old Tyme Fiddlers: How Technique Was Shaped by Dance Traditions

Although there are regional variants, such as different tunes being played in different provinces in Canada, there is a core repertoire common

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[45] John W. Bennett and Seena B. Kohl, Settling the Canadian-American West, 1890-1915 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 138.
[46] Bennett and Kohl, Canadian-American West, pp. 138-139.
[47] Pauline Neher Diede, The Prairie Was Home (Richardton, ND: Abbey Press, 1986), pp. 123-124.

to most players of old tyme music. Much of the repetoire of the fiddler is learned through listening to other fiddlers at jam sessions, at fiddle contests, or on radio or audio recordings. Tunes in the standard repetoire of an old tyme fiddler vary from musician to musician due to the personal interpretations of each fiddler. For old tyme dances there is also a set repetoire of tunes in various styles including waltzes, polkas, schottisches, etc. Throughout different provinces or into the United States the standard tunes usually will remain intact, but many new tunes will be added. Identical tunes may be named differently depending on geographical location.

There are a number of characteristics that distinguish old tyme from other styles such as bluegrass. To begin with old tyme has a vibrancy and vitality essential to square dancing. Square dancing is an essential part of an old tyme dance. At an old tyme dance the fiddler, the accompanying musicians, the caller, and the dancers must work together for a successful dance. Fiddlers have the most important job of all; they must coordinate the interaction between all these factors. Another distinctive feature of old tyme dance music is that it must be loud, rhythmic, and melodically simple in order to be right for old tyme dancing, as seen in musical example two.

Certain playing techniques were developed to deal with old tyme dance environments. For example, the fiddlers had to overcome the

enormous obstacle of being heard over the noise created by a barn full of people without the aid of electrical amplification. The simultaneous use of two strings made it possible either to drone the tonic or play the melody twice as loud. In addition, fiddlers increased their volume by using more bow pressure. This very heavy bow stroke can cause the playing to sound scratchy, but this was accepted as necessary in large, noisy dance halls.[48]

One of the most important elements for old tyme dance fiddlers is the rhythm which must be extremely steady to keep the dancers and the accompanying musicians together. This does not mean that the fiddler must keep in strict time as in musical example two. The fiddler will adjust the timing to suit the tune and the dancers. The task of keeping the rhythm accurate falls to the fiddler who has several ways to accomplish this. For example, old tyme fiddlers have developed bowing styles which strongly accentuate the beat, as seen in musical example two. Guntharp explains these:

> Each time a note is bowed rather than slurred, there is a punctuation. Also, the intensity with which each note is bowed allows for a slight variation in punctuation among the notes. A repeating pattern of bow strokes will create a recurring rhythmic sequence.[49]

There are many styles that have developed within old tyme fiddling that can provide rhythmic patterns appropriate for accompanying dances.

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[48] Matthew G. Guntharp, Learning the Fiddler's Ways (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980), pp. 87-88.
[49] Cited by Guntharp, Learning, p. 88.

Dennis Ricker, a square dance caller aptly summarized the unique role of the old tyme fiddler:

> For the country square dance you have to have the right kind of tune. There's a country hoedown sound that comes from a double-stopped fiddle that you just cannot duplicate; that makes up good oldtime square dancing.[50]

Rural Community: Cultural Roots of Old Tyme Music

A definition of the term "culture" has been a source of debate among many disciplines. Most anthropologists agree that culture "...is something shared to a large extent by everyone in a particular society, something we learn from each other and from past generations, something that influences how we think and act."[51] In this paper culture will be defined through both a cognitive and symbolic approach. First, it will be viewed as "systems of knowledge - the things people have to know or believe in order to behave in ways that are acceptable to their group."[52] Second, using Clifford Geertz's concept of "thick description" culture will also be defined as "...socially established patterns...as 'texts' of a sort, models of and for reality and social interaction."[53]

To understand the people and communities who are involved in old tyme music it is first necessary to examine their social arrangements,

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[50] Guntharp, Learning, p. 89.
[51] Elmer S. Miller, "The Culture Concept," in Introduction to Cultural Anthropology (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1979), p. 37.
[52] Miller, Cultural Anthropology, p. 49.
[53] Miller, Cultural Anthropology, p. 53.

institutions, occupations, recreational activities and behaviours. This study focuses on two types of rural life: the farming-centered community and the small town. The approach to life and family is essentially the same in both places.

Studies on farming communities or rural towns in Alberta focusing specifically on leisure activities and social interactions are few and far between. The lack of literature in this area is partially due to:

> ...the fact that social scientists began their study of communities with established examples in the western world and then extended the work into existing peasant and tribal societies. Few or no studies were made of the kind of social interaction that might produce the shared ideas and behaviors found in communities, but it is precisely this process that occurred on the homestead frontier.[54]

Ideally the researcher should use a combination of primary and secondary sources in understanding and reconstructing the history of rural communities. A small number of informative sources on rural communities look at the social and recreational aspects of these areas, however these discussions are brief. This lack of primary sources forced me to turn to secondary material for information. This data often takes the form of re-created memories, whether published in first hand accounts, letters and diaries from actual participants or autobiographies. The main problem with these sources is their authenticity and to what extent time, or other factors have influenced them. This difficulty is dealt

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[54] John W. Bennett and Seena B. Kohl, Settling the Canadian-American West, 1890-1915 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 108.

with in chapter three. Valuable information can be gleaned from a careful critique of many secondary accounts.

Farming was traditionally the main source of income in rural society. This changed as new industries such as factories appeared, the result of a changing market and urbanization. Many people earned their living through farm-related occupations such as processing and marketing farm products, retailing and wholesaling consumer goods or working in industrial plants. A main difference between these types of occupations is that farming provides the family with a place to live and at the same time a place to work; it creates a stronger family bond because the family owns their business and must all work together to see that it succeeds.[55]

The agricultural family is the working unit as well as the living unit. Their relative isolation compared to urban families produces strong family and neighbour bonds because they do not have the entertainment options available in a large centre. Village or town communities function somewhat like extended farm families. Homes and businesses are not usually far apart, located near neighbours and relatives who form intimate ties. One characteristic of the farm family is that it lives in the midst of its occupation. The family and its home, together with the farm and its area, make up the living and the working unit. Consequently, this is the physical and the social environment in which the farm family lives

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[55] John H. Kolb and Edmund S. Brunner, A Study of Rural Society (Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1952), p. 61.

and works. The occupational environment puts all the members of the family group into close contact with each other. Looking at the occupational environment of rural people is essential because: "It is in this world that the group develops and builds up its modes of behavior and its institutions and traditions."[56]

In farm families there is a sentimental attachment or relationship that exists between the family group and its homestead. This attachment is created through close contact with family members caused by close working relations within the family. A solidarity and cohesion develops within these relationships largely because they are working towards some common goal such as paying off the mortgage or buying more land. Even women and children have an important role to play in contrast to the urban family where the father or mother alone is the breadwinner.

The town or village family is considered rural although it is situated between farm and city families. While the town followed many facets of country life, which asserted the social significance of the farm in society, it also mimicked the trade/business life of the city. Small towns were places where everybody knew everyone else, and where businesses were owned and operated by neighbours. In fact, I myself come from a small town in Ontario and the family business is readily apparent there. In my hometown over half of the retail and repair businesses are owned

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[56] Kolb and Brunner, Rural Society, p. 141.

and operated by families, each generation taking over from the one previous. In addition, it is common for the family to own the land on which is found its house and business establishment.

Social Relations: The Importance of Neighbours and Family

Another important aspect in determining the behaviour of rural people is the influence of neighbours. A neighbourhood in rural terms consists of groups of families whose members know each other well and who recognize each other by their first names. Often, these neighbours are close relatives or are members of the extended family. Frequently they are affiliated by school, church, or social tiers.[57] In a broader sense, neighbourhood can be defined as "...the first group larger than the family which has social significance, and which has some sense of local unity."[58]

The bond that neighbourhood relations create is fundamental in influencing personality and exerting social control. Sociologist Charles H. Cooley placed significant weight upon the importance of neighbourhood relations or "primary groups." He used the term primary groups to indicate those relationships that are personal, intimate, and essential to forming the social nature and the ideals of the individual. Cooley went as

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[57] Kolb and Brunner, Rural Society, p. 159.
[58] Kolb and Brunner, Rural Society, p. 159.

far as saying that "...personality cannot exist without such association or fellowship. Human nature is but a trait of primary groups.."[59]

Such neighbourhoods have existed since the first settlers arrived in Alberta. The use of the terms "community" and "neighbourhood" in local histories and by contemporary residents continues to suggest a clear ideology of altruism, mutual aid, friendship, and collective support. Many residents of early communities feel contemporary society is lacking in comparison.

> Neighbors helped one another build houses and barns and went to Maple Creek together for their loads. The community spirit was wonderful. Everyone had a smile and a cheerful word at all times....The neighbors were all kind and would lend a hand at any time....The pleasant memories still live in the minds of us left behind of a good neighbor never to be forgotten.[60]

Many people believed that this form of social organization would die out because of the increased ease of communicating with the rest of the world. In part this is true; there are fewer neighbourhoods of this kind; mostly they exist in the few small towns that are left throughout Canada. In addition, there have been other groups that have taken on the role that the neighbourhood once performed; the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association is one of these groups. This idea of other groups replacing neighbourhoods will be discussed in the next chapter. .

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[59] Charles H. Cooley, Social Organization (New York: Scribner, 1925) chpt. III.
[60] John W. Bennett and Seena B. Kohl, Settling the Canadian-American West, 1890-1915 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 121.

The word neighbourhood suggests obligations amidst interdependence. Both are necessary to the work of building up neighbourhoods, and of making contacts which holds the group together. Activities in today's rural neighbourhoods are much the same as those of forty years ago; life centres about school, church, local stores, social and economic organizations and in kinship relations and exchange of work. This is not to say that there are no changes. There are more cars which allow for increased mobility and the Internet, for example, makes it possible to connect to the rest of the world instead of being isolated as they once were.

Families are important groups in any society, but they are especially important in rural society. The home was seen as:

> ...the essential force in the socialization of children and in the control and training of adolescents. It provided adults with purpose in life and with a set of responsibilities and personalized structures that ensured social order and cohesion. But it was also a place of relaxation, informality, and retreat from the stresses of life and society.[61]

Without access to commercial entertainment such as movie theatres, clubs, and concert halls, rural people tended to find their leisure activities within the home or with surrounding neighbours. These activities consisted of sports, local organizations, clubs, etc. In between these events there was always time to visit and socialize. These visits

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[61] Donald G. Wetherell and Irene Kmet, Useful Pleasures: The Shaping of Leisure in Alberta 1896-1945 (Saskatchewan: Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism/Canadian Plains Research Center, 1990), p. 43.

consisting of eating, playing cards and/or gossiping usually took place on Sundays or occasional weekday nights.[62] The home was the place of leisure activities such as reading, music, games, hobbies, gardening and crafts.

Music had an especially important place in the leisure activities of rural people. Although music had a much wider application for leisure than mere home entertainment, "...an evening made up of reading and music was idealized as the perfect family event."[63] One prime example of the importance of music as entertainment in the rural family is the life of Don Messer. Messer "...had been playing for dances and parties since the age of seven; he had worked on the farm and had lived the life of a farm boy; he had done household duties."[64] Messer had a certain role within his family and particular tasks that were assigned to him, however, music still formed an important part of his youth.

During the interwar years, increasing amounts of music were accessible via radio or phonograph. Musical instruments in the home provided a cheap source of entertainment during a time when money was tight. Music "...could create family unity and counter the children's

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[62] Paul Voisey, Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p. 157.
[63] Donald G. Wetherell and Irene Kmet, Useful Pleasures: The Shaping of Leisure in Alberta 1896-1945 (Saskatchewan: Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism/Canadian Plains Research Center, 1990), p. 53.
[64] Lester B. Sellick, Canada's Don Messer (Kentville, Nova Scotia: Kentville Publishing Co., Ltd., 1969), p. 13.

instincts to wander: a musical environment would keep the family together at home."[65] The most popular instruments in Alberta homes were pianos, violins, banjos and accordions. Most learned to play by trial and error, but there were a few people who took formal lessons or ordered material by mail.

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[65] Donald G. Wetherell and Irene Kmet, Useful Pleasures: The Shaping of Leisure in Alberta 1896-1945 (Saskatchewan: Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism/Canadian Plains Research Center, 1990), p. 54.

Chapter Three - The Re-creation of Rural Community

> *I was born in the Ernfold district about 10 miles southeast, on what was known as the Fletcher farm, on July 29, 1916...We were a large family and very musical. My Dad played accordion and clarinet. He bought each of the 5 boys an instrument to play. When I was 9 he bought me my first violin for $7.00 and my brothers got guitars. We had a good friend Mr. Peter Diebert, who had come from the Old Country with the folks. He started me playing the violin as well as a few other instruments, one being the harp. We used to get together as a family orchestra of Walter, Jack, Fred, sister Ella and myself. Time took us on our ways and I was usually left to gather an orchestra to play lead violin or accordion. We used to play for house parties, birthday parties, dances, and special events and benefits. I feel much at home when I sit down to play with a group for just plain entertainment. Alex Weinbender, 1975*[66]

The above quotation exhibits the importance of memories to individuals. It shows the significant role old tyme music played in the lives of people in the early twentieth century. Furthermore, it is apparent that old tyme music was not viewed just as entertainment but as creating social bonds. The central idea of this thesis is that the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association is re-creating the social bonds formed in small, rural communities. Many concepts enter into this idea such as the formation of personal identity which is indefinitely linked with the community, "shared knowledge" of the culture surrounding the community, and memory, including collective memory, the validity of oral history and memory distortion.

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[66] Cited in Harold J. Newlove, ed., Fiddlers of the Canadian West (Regina, Saskatchewan: New Horizons, 1976), p. 208.

Shared & Cultural Knowledge: Unspoken Guidelines of Behaviour

Social relationships are an integral part of human life. The choice of people with whom to form these relationships varies or is made for us, such as in the case of siblings and parents. There are some common characteristics that one usually finds among social relationships. The people generally share something in common, whether it be a hobby, job, family, etc. In the case of the fiddlers, they share a number of features such as love of old tyme music, backgrounds rooted in rural communities, and coming from the working class.

The shared knowledge and background between the fiddlers can be attributed to them coming from the same group within society. Harry Oxley and Linda Hort in their article "Ecologies of Meaning," discuss the idea of groups and shared knowledge within these groups:

> Culture cannot be talked about very easily outside of the very simplest societies in any way other than in the context of various groups...We live in groups, most of us living a little of our lives in each of many of them. It is the special variants of culture in those groups that form our personal thinking, and it is only through groups - the same or different ones - that we can make any inputs.[67]

Most of the club members share the same group on two levels: first, they share a common background of being from the working class and originating from rural towns, classing them as a certain group within

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[67] Harry Oxley and Linda Hort, "Ecologies of Meaning," in The Construction of Group Realities: Culture, Society, and Personal Construct Theory. eds. Devorah Kalekin-Fishman and Beverly M. Walker (Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company, 1996), p. 374.

society. Second, they form another group, that of the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association. Within each of these groups is contained a shared knowledge or cultural knowledge that is distinct to the members of these assemblies.

Clifford Geertz, in his article "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," discusses the complexity of culture and the difficulty associated with describing it:

> ...ethnographic description of even the most elemental sort - how extraordinarily 'thick' it is. In finished anthropological writings, including those collected here, this fact - that what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to.[68]

Geertz maintains that the only way to describe culture is through thick description. This refers to various actions within a culture that can be taken at face value or can be analyzed for its actual significance. For example, in the fiddling club many of the musicians while leading a song will hold one of their legs out straight. One could describe this simply as stretching one's legs but this would be taking a thin description for a thick because the actual meaning of holding out one leg is a signal that this is the last phrase of the song and then it will end.

The example of the straight leg implies that there is a cultural knowledge that is distinct to a particular group. In the case of the Wild

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[68] Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Book, Inc., 1973), p. 9.

Rose club there is a culture that is known only to the members of this group. Geertz defines this as:

> ...culture is best seen not as complexes of concrete behavior patterns - customs, usages, traditions, habit clusters - as has, by and large, been the case up to now, but as a set of control mechanisms - plans, recipes, rules, instructions (what computer engineers call 'programs') - for the governing of behavior. The second idea is that man is precisely the animal most desperately dependent upon such extragenetic, outside-the-skin control mechanisms, such cultural programs, for ordering his behavior.[69]

People learn these "programs" or rules from within their family, friends, and from the place or group in which they live. These set patterns of behaviour are passed down from generation to generation and will differ from group to group or culture to culture. In order to re-enact the social bonds found in rural communities the club members first need to be aware of the patterns of behaviour or knowledge surrounding rural areas. Most of the club members originate from rural towns and possess the cultural knowledge of this group. This shared knowledge is integral to re-creating these social relationships because these relationships are governed by behaviour.

Narrative: Its Use in Reconstructing Memory

As previously mentioned, it appears that the members are re-creating within the club the social relationships and bonds once found in the rural communities from which they came. Most of the members

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[69] Geertz, "The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man," in The Interpretation of Cultures, p. 44.

originally come from small towns and remember the atmosphere and relationships found there. This raises issues related to memory, including the validity of personal memories, the distortion in memory over time, and to what extent memory is self-serving.

In his book, Realities and Relationships: Soundings in Social Construction, Kenneth J. Gergen discusses memory in relation to self-narration in social life through the use of telling stories:

> Most of us begin our encounters with stories in childhood. Through fairy tales, folktales, and family stories we receive our first organized accounts of human action. Stories continue to absorb us as we read novels, biography, and history; they occupy us at the movies, at the theater, and before the television set. And, possibly because of this intimate and long-standing acquaintanceship, stories also serve as a critical means by which we make ourselves intelligible within the social world. We tell extended stories about our childhoods, our relations with family members, our years at school, our first love affair, the development of our thinking on a given subject, and so on...In each case, we use the story form to identify ourselves to others and to ourselves.[70]

In western Canadian culture people frequently use stories to relate the past, relying on memory but also imagination. These stories that we tell are not the truth but versions of the truth, altered by a number of factors. To begin with we often change and adapt our stories depending upon whom we are talking to. For example, upon interviewing various members of the club I observed that their memories were altered to fit

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[70] Kenneth J. Gergen, Realities and Relationships: Soundings in Social Construction (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 185-186.

what they thought I wanted to hear. In one of my interviews my consultant began by saying:

> ...you probably want to know about lessons and things. Well that's kind of a story too. Well, how I got started was in elementary school. We had a special night when people got up on stage to perform. Well, this fella, he must have been high school, he was quite a bit older and he was playing the fiddle and I was really interested.[71]

Although I did want to know when and how my consultant became interested in the fiddle, I had not mentioned anything related to this and they automatically adjusted their conversation to fit what they thought I wanted to know. Inevitably we all tell stories about ourselves and our experiences that are adapted to fit another person. We see this action all around us: on television, in political speeches, at job interviews, etc.

Stories serve as communal resources that people use in ongoing relationships and in daily life. Gergen states that "...stories do not represent the truth, rather they create the sense of 'what is true.'"[72] However, there are boundary lines demarcating where the story passes from "telling the truth" to a "tall-tale." This line is governed by a structure which the story must adhere to in order to be accepted. Initially the story must have an established goal or "point." For instance, in one of my interviews my consultant related how when he was a teenager he saw a girl in a marching band and tried to talk to her, but she would not have

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[71] Club Member 3, Interview, November 30, 1995.
[72] Kenneth J. Gergen, Realities and Relationships: Soundings in Social Construction (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 189.

anything to do with him. These few sentences would constitute an unfit story. However, when we here the whole story we find out that this story is a prelude to how my consultant became involved in making music, then it would approximate an acceptable story.

> I was going by Sherwood school out in Jasper Place [Edmonton] and there was a fence around the school. I was getting at the age where I started to see girls here and there and there were these girls dressed in these little outfits and they were marching, eh? And there was a band in front playing so, this one girl when they stopped to have a little break I tried to talk to her through the fence but she wouldn't give me the time of day. She'd smile but that was about it. At the end of the thing you know, I could see one guy playing the slide trombone that I knew. I went and saw him and I said how long do you have to play before you can play in the band? He said well, as long as you can play some of the tunes, you can go out marching, you can go to the parades, and then we have concerts as well. It was the Lion's Club band is what it was. So, I started thinking to myself well I'll learn to play, to know that girl I'll learn to play an instrument. So, I went to see the band leader and I said I want to play in your band. He said what do you play and I said nothing. He said well, you can't play in the band yet, you have to learn to play an instrument. I said well, do you give lessons? He said yes, we have lessons every Saturday morning. I said how much are lessons? He said ten cents each. Well, you can't go wrong so, he said what do you want to play? I said I don't know what plays in the front row cause the majorettes march in front. He said slide trombone, front row. Okay, that's what I want to learn how to play.
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> So, I went there and he gave me my first lesson on that first Saturday morning. He told me to go to Kenora school out in the west end [Edmonton]. So, I took this lesson and I went home with the book and everything else and I practiced. Mom, after about half way through that lesson, she sent me out to the garage. Slide trombone is a little loud for the house. So, I went into the garage and practiced and practiced and then I finished that first lesson and I got it down reasonably pat and gee, and I thought I'm going to start working on the second lesson. So, I worked the first three lessons. So, next Saturday I went to the thing and he said can you do the first lesson? I said yes. I played it. He said okay we will start on the second. I said oh, I can do the second too and then the third. Oh, he said that's very good, keep it up it won't take you

> very long to play in the band. I said that's what I want to do, I want to play in the band. So well, he said we can get to lesson nine or lesson ten he said we'll invite you out to play with the band. That's great, so the next week I did three more lessons again and the week after that I only did two because they were a lot tougher. I think within two months I was up with the band. I was trying to learn to play their songs, but I wasn't playing in the parade yet. Then I really worked hard learning to play the songs and I could within about three months. Yes, about the end of the third month I was out there and was able to play a few songs they were playing. I was able to follow the music and play. Then we went on the bus out to Drayton Valley [Alberta], Peace River [Alberta], Jasper [Alberta], Hinton [Alberta], Bonnyville [Alberta], and Llyodminster [Alberta], a lot of parades and then a few concerts here and there. And I got to know the little girl (laugh).[73]

Besides having an endpoint, acceptable stories are encompassed by a structure built around this endpoint. First, once the goal or endpoint has been established, all other events in the narrative must relate to this goal. This means that if the story is to be believable the narrator must present events which serve to make the goal more or less probable, accessible, important or real. Second, the goal controls the ordering of the events. This order is highly susceptible to change over time, and may be altered due to importance, interest value, timeliness, the storyteller's own purposes, and so forth.[74]

For example, in the story about how my consultant first became interested in music, the order of events could have been changed if he wished to place more importance on the girl and less on the music. Third,

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[73] Club Member Guy Tetreault, Interview, November 23, 1995.
[74] Kenneth J. Gergen, Realities and Relationships: Soundings in Social Construction (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 190-191.

the story usually retains characters that possess a continuous identity across time. For example, characters cannot change their personality type to the extreme opposite unless the story explains this change. Generally, good stories do not tolerate changeable personalities. Fourth, the story should contain causal linkages and a plausible explanation for the outcome.[75] The club member's story could have ended with the fact that he saw a girl in a band and he joined the band to meet her. While this would make for a rudimentary story, we find out that it does not end there, that the member learned an instrument and joined the band within two months and "I got to know the little girl!" The member has weaved the explanation or outcome of the girl into his narrative creating a well-informed story.

Lastly, the most effective stories, according to Gergen, utilize signals to denote the beginning and the end. There are many narrative devices that show when a story is about to begin. The most commonly employed signals are "Once upon a time...," "You can't imagine what happened to me on the way over here...," etc.[76] In the interviews I have done with the members of the club the most popular way to begin a story was to employ a time device signalling the beginning of the narrative, such as "When I was a youngster," or "I was about thirteen at the time...,"

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[75] Gergen, Realities, pp. 191-192.
[76] Gergen, Realities, p. 192.

etc. For example in one of my interviews my consultant began a long story with a signal:

> I was about thirteen at the time, twelve or thirteen. And the kids at school started coming to school with a harmonica in their pocket. They were playing harmonica, but they weren't playing anything; they were just making noise, eh? It was cool to have a harmonica in those days in Bonnyville. Not like living in Edmonton of course, as you'll find out. Anyhow, I got Mom and Dad to buy me one of these for my birthday. So, I got a harmonica and I started to just make noise on the darn thing. Finally, after about a week my dad said listen, he said, you're either going to learn to play that thing properly, he said, or it's going in the garbage. I said what do you mean? He said you're just making noise, you're not making any music, he said. Learn to hold it with the low notes to your left, he said, find the scale. He said once you find that, learn a simple song, like some of the simple songs we learned in school. So I started, and sure enough after a couple of weeks I got two or three tunes going and I could play reasonably well. Then my dad helped me a little bit and I learned about seven or eight more tunes. Then low and behold my dad quit his job and got a job in Edmonton. So, we moved to Edmonton. It wasn't cool to carry a harmonica in your pocket in those days when you're thirteen years old in Edmonton. So, the harmonica went in the back drawers somewhere. I never saw it again until about ten years ago. I started playing again a bit because a friend of mine played the accordion and I started playing a little bit of harmonica...[77]

These examples signal that the storyteller is going to relate something that happened in the past, indicating the start of a narrative.

Gergen states that while endings may be signalled by phrases such as "That's it...," "So now you know...," they do not need to have these "exit signals." Many stories are ended at the description of the story's point which indicate the exit from the story world. Some stories are ended by

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[77] Club Member Guy Tetreault, Interview, November 23, 1995.

laughter; often this happens at the end of a joke.[78] I found that in many of my interviews the storyteller would indicate the end of the narrative either with a funny statement about something that related to the story or just by ending with a laugh. One such example was when one of the club's members was talking about playing both old tyme and bluegrass and how difficult it was to switch back and forth between the two styles on his instrument (not fiddle). He ended the story by saying: "And I, one of these days I may just buy myself a fiddle if the price is right and I'm going to learn to play the darn thing too (laugh)." Although we were not talking about his wish to learn the fiddle, we were discussing different fiddlers that he liked and this statement clearly signalled the end of his thoughts on this subject.

Although the above criteria are necessary to create a well-formed narrative, they are not always found within the structure of the story. There have been studies done on autobiography that suggest men use these criteria to form their stories, whereas women tend to have stories that are structured around multiple endpoints and they include material that is unrelated to any endpoint they have introduced. In my interviews, both formal and informal, I found this conclusion to be true. Three-quarters of the men I interviewed employed structures making for well-

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[78] Kenneth J. Gergen, Realities and Relationships: Soundings in Social Construction (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 192.

formed narratives, while at least half of the women varied this structure greatly.

Gergen questions whether it is necessary to use well-formed narratives in everyday life and he concludes that:

> ...the use of narrative components would appear to be vital in creating a sense of reality in accounts of self. As Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992) put it, "How individuals recount their histories - what they emphasize and omit, their stance as protagonists or victims, the relationship the story establishes between teller and audience - all shape what individuals can claim of their own lives. Personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one's life; they are the means by which identities may be fashioned" (p.1).[79]

Thus, stories are essential to understanding each other and ourselves. This is certainly true of the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association, where stories appear to be the main technique used by members to associate with each other. Story-telling was employed in the most valuable information I gathered through formal and informal interviews, as well as observation. In addition, I noted that in various biographies of fiddlers story-telling was a favoured way of relating the past.[80]

One of the reasons story-telling plays a prominent role in this club is due to old tyme culture itself. Recall that the culture of old tyme music comes from the oral tradition where the memories of music and society are stored within individual participant's minds. Elizabeth Tonkin states in

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[79] Gergen, Realities, p. 193.

[80] For an example of story-telling in biographical literature on fiddlers, please see: Harold Newlove, ed., Fiddlers of the Canadian West (Regina, Saskatchewan: New Horizons, 1976).

her book, Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History that:

> ...orality is the basic human mode of communication, and although peoples all over the world now use literate means to represent pastness, and written records have existed for many hundreds of years, the business of relating past and present for social ends has for most of the time been done orally; it still is so.[81]

Since old tyme music is an important factor in the social lives of its participants, the memories of its music makers figure prominently in its preservation. As previously mentioned storytelling was and is the main device used to transmit and preserve old tyme music culture. Although valuable, these stories have certain drawbacks. In order to relate a past event the storyteller often creates or exaggerates specific elements of the story to make it more interesting or more memorable to the listener.

In the book: Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past, Michael Schudson states that: "Narrativization is an effort not only to report the past but to make it interesting. Narratives simplify."[82] In a number of conversations with the members of the club and in biographical studies of old tyme fiddlers, they tended to emphasize the positive aspects of growing up in small, rural towns. They stressed the close relationships in rural communities, the friendliness of people,

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[81] Elizabeth Tonkin, Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 3.
[82] Michael Schudson, "Dynamics of Distortion in Collective Memory," in Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past, ed. by Daniel L. Schacter, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 355.

the willingness to help one another and the social bonds this created. The narration of these relationships simplify what actually took place. The storytellers leave out negative details such as the considerable gossip, conflicts, and differentiation in class struggles. The stories of the club members simplify and concentrate on the positive aspects of the social relationships in these towns rather than presenting the entire picture which would include negative aspects.

Second, successful stories frequently feature individual protagonists and antagonists rather than structures, trends, or social forces. Schudson accounts for this phenomena as: "Particular works of art or efforts at story-telling may live on in memory in ways that overwhelm less dramatic, less lucid, less epitomized, less narrativized ways of telling the past."[83] For example, one of the fiddlers in the club may recount a past experience attending an old tyme dance. He then may describe the music and the musicians. This memory in itself would be a story; however the fiddler may add drama to the story by focusing on the lead fiddler of the dance, anchoring the story around this person:

> ...usually when it's the Wild Rose Dance there's two fiddlers up on stage at once, so, usually like I say *A's* the main leader so usually I switch off with *B* or I switch off with *C*. *A* stays up. He doesn't always like that but anyway, as for the other dances, like the dance I played for was actually *A's*. I helped him out and because he gets paid for that one. And what happened was he was there all willing to play and we had a great time and oh, a hundred and fifty people, hundred and seventy-five. Lot of people and I usually go and lend him a hand. So we get up there and start playing. We played one

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[83] Schudson, Memory Distortion, p. 357.

> set and right before the second set started, *D* walks in, so, *A* went off stage and passed his fiddle to *D* and said "Here, you're playing." So *D* and myself and as the second set was rolling on, in walked another fiddle player an older fella who was outside the city. He's very good. He likes to play alone, so *D* got off stage with his fiddle, handed it to *E* says here you're playing the next set so, *E* got up there and played and played and played. He did a great job. And then the next thing you know *D's* up on stage again and he calls for me to come up so I help him out, and *A* got paid for a dance he only played one set of tunes for! But, I mean we all have a good time, we all like to play...[84]

Memory is Social: Individual and Collective Memory

In the study of memory and its subsequent distortion there are two schools of thought, focusing on individual memory and collective memory. Although there are aspects such as biography which are particular to individual memory, one viewpoint in sociological literature is that there is no such thing as individual memory. Michael Schudson in his article "Dynamics of Distortion in Collective Memory," holds to this opinion stating that:

> Memory is social. It is social, first of all, because it is located in institutions rather than in individual human minds in the form of rules, laws, standardized procedures, and records, a whole set of cultural practices through which people recognize a debt to the past (including the notion of 'debt' itself) or through which they express moral continuity with the past (tradition, identity, career, curriculum). These cultural forms store and transmit information that individuals make use of without themselves 'memorizing' it. The individual's capacity to make use of the past piggybacks on the social and cultural practices of memory.[85]

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[84] Club Member 3, Interview, November 30, 1995.

[85] Michael Schudson, "Dynamics of Distortion in Collective Memory," in Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past, ed. by Daniel L. Schacter, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 346-347.

Schudson's main premise is that memory is social and therefore cultural. There are a number of things that would constitute cultural knowledge. For example, I can sit here at my computer and type ten pages of my thesis that are then stored in the computer for my use the next time. However, I can do this without knowing how my computer stores and processes this information. In relation to the fiddling club, the members can play a variety of old tyme music from memory without ever seeing a note of music.

Second, Schudson points out that:

> ...where memory can be located in individual minds, it may characterize groups of individuals - generations or occupational groups. In these cases memory is an individual property but so widely shared as to be accurately termed social or collective.[86]

This idea is directly applicable to the Wild Rose Old tyme Fiddler's Association. Although each member has their own memories of old tyme music and the rural communities in which it was found, their memories are so mutually experienced that the memory or knowledge becomes collective or social. For example, the following description of old tyme dances is a memory of one individual, however, this memory has been shared by every fiddler in this book. Consequently, the memory becomes a collective experience.

> The house parties and the school house dances were attended by everyone within driving distance for horses. I doubt that the dancers in the old days were as good as the ones of today as I think

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[86] Schudson, Memory Distortion, p. 347.

> sometimes there was a lot of stumbling around the floor, but what we lacked in grace was made up in enthusiasm and enjoyment.[87]

Lastly, Schudson states that:

> ...even where memories are located idiosyncratically in individual minds, they remain social and cultural in that (a) they operate through the supra-individual cultural construction of language; (b) they generally come into play in response to social stimulation, rehearsal, or social cues - the act of remembering is itself interactive, prompted by cultural artifacts and social cues, employed for social purposes, and even enacted by cooperative activity; and (c) there are socially structured patterns of recall.[88]

Despite the fact that the fiddlers possess memories of old tyme music culture unique to the individual they are revealed when stimulated by a social cue. There are a number of social cues that elicit a memory response. In my experience of the club these cues can be verbal such as when someone mentions the title of a particular song which activates a memory of the song being heard at an old tyme dance. For example, at one of the jam sessions I remember someone requesting a particular song. After the song was finished it elicited a long description of when they first heard the song played and the surroundings in which they heard it.[89] This song brought forth a long series of reminiscences that otherwise may have remained dormant. Or the memory can be cued

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[87] Ivy Horner cited in, Harold Newlove, ed., Fiddlers of the Canadian West (Swift Current, Saskatchewan: Harold Newlove, 1976), p. 110.
[88] Michael Schudson, "Dynamics of Distortion in Collective Memory," in Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past, ed. by Daniel L. Schacter, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 347.
[89] Lisa Stormer, Fieldnotes, March 28, 1996.

by a "cultural artifact" such as a particular make of fiddle or the type of setting in which the group is playing. Moreover the entire club functions on memories which are carried out as an expression in response to social cues. The members re-create both the setting, music and social bonds found in the old tyme jams of the past. The main social cue for this re-creation is the music.

We now turn from individual memory to the issue of collective memory in relationship to the club. In her book, Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory, Iwona Irwin-Zarecka defines collective memory: "...as a set of ideas, images, feelings about the past - is best located not in the minds of individuals, but in the resources they share."[90]

This collective memory is important in understanding a particular culture or group such as the fiddling club. My use of collective memory in this study encompasses the broad cultural knowledge that each individual within a particular group shares. There are certain patterns of behaviour and ways of remembering that are automatic to the people of a particular culture. For example, in the fiddle club or "culture" the group takes turns performing songs, automatically passing the microphone to the next person after they have played one piece. This behaviour is habitual; it is not something that the musicians need to consciously think about and no

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[90] Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory (New Brunswick: Tranaction Publishers, 1994), p. 4.

verbal cues are provided. Newcomers must learn by observation. This behaviour is characteristic of old tyme culture and is part of the participants' shared cultural knowledge.

Besides defining the present, collective memory plays a role in relating the past. Irwin-Zarecka contends that collective memory must be dealt with when investigating past events:

> First, collective memory is intricately related, though in variable ways, to the sense of collective identity individuals come to acquire. And second, it is imbued with moral imperatives - the obligations to one's kin, notions of justice, indeed, the lessons of right and wrong - that form the basic parts of the normative order. On both counts, collective memory is then a significant orienting force, or, something we need to understand better in order to account for why people do what they do.[91]

When addressing issues of past occurrences or memories, it is inevitable that collective memory will play an active role. Within the fiddling club, collective memory refers to a number of different aspects. First, it involves describing the heritage of the members of the club. Most of the members originate from small, rural towns in Alberta. The memories that they share of this experience are not so much individual, being repeated again and again across rural Alberta so that they are a storehouse of public memories. These experiences create a shared sense of meaning and relevance to the members of the club when they come together. Consequently this shared experience or memory produces and ensures

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[91] Irwin-Zarecka, Frames of Remembrance, p. 9.

social bonds among the members because they promote a sense of belonging.

Memory Recall: The Importance of Conversation

Irwin-Zarecka proposes that:

> If collective memory is understood as we understand it here, not as a collection of individual memories or some magically constructed reservoir of ideas and images, but rather as a socially articulated and socially maintained "reality of the past," then it also makes sense to look at the most basic and accessible means for memory articulation and maintenance - talk.[92]

The atmosphere of the fiddling club provides the perfect opportunity to talk and share memories and experiences with other people. It has been my experience that members of the club like to talk about themselves and the past. All that is needed is an attentive listener.

Talking appears as important as the music-making within the club. Again, there are two groups at the jams; namely the musicians and the audience. The audience constantly talks throughout the evening, while listening to the music. Topics under discussion vary greatly, but there are frequent references to old tyme music culture. Often these comments are cued by a particular song or mention of a certain fiddler. For example, one evening a particular pianist came to play with the group, and he was requested to play a song that he had written. Following the performance of the song was a rush of discussion of when they first heard the song

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[92] Irwin-Zarecka, Frames of Remembrance, pp. 54-55.

performed and the event and people that were at that first hearing. In chatting with the audience I found it very easy to acquire information about old tyme music and its culture. The mention of old tyme dances would almost always elicit a description of past experiences at an old tyme dance or jam. These remembrances ranged from weeks to months to years before.

The musicians likewise talked frequently about memories revolving around old tyme music. Like the audience, when a certain song was played or a particular composer mentioned, they would respond with a series of accounts of past experiences. For example, in one of my formal interviews the name of the well-known Maritime fiddler, Don Messer came up. This mere mention led to a long discussion of memories from my consultant's childhood in which I learned of old tyme musicians in his family, the origin of his interest in old tyme music, how he got involved in the club and how he learned to play his instrument. This flood of information was started by the cueing of memory with the name of a Canadian fiddler.

Memories evidently are sustained in this club by talking, but they are also maintained through the shared bonds between the members. In his book, How Societies Remember, Paul Connerton draws upon the work of Maurice Halbwachs and states:

> What binds together recent memories is not the fact that they are contiguous in time but rather the fact that they form part of a whole ensemble of thoughts common to a group, to the groups with

> which we are in a relationship at present or have been in some connection in the recent past. When we wish to evoke such memories it is enough if we direct our attention to the prevailing interests of the group and follow the course of reflection customary to it.[93]

Applying this idea to the fiddling club presents a new way of looking at how the members recollect and re-enact their memories of old tyme culture. The club is a place where the stated goal is perpetuation of old tyme music. Most of the members share memories of old tyme music and when socializing together these memories come to the forefront because old tyme music is the predominant interest of the group. Consequently music is seen as the focal point of mapping the past. Music is the prevailing interest of the group and becomes the enactment of sharing their connections. Music creates the space where memories are localized by mapping. In additional this musical space is portable, allowing the members to bring it to different locations and venues. When the club members are jamming together it evokes many different memories that are associated either directly or indirectly with old tyme music such as particular people or groups, communities, towns, friends or family.

Connerton maintains that groups are important in the recalling of memories:

> It is not because thoughts are similar that we can evoke them; it is rather because the same group is interested in those memories, and is able to evoke them, that they are assembled together in our minds.

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[93] Paul Connerton, How Societies Remember (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 36-37.

> Groups provide individuals with frameworks within which their memories are localised and memories are localised by a kind of mapping. We situate what we recollect within the mental spaces provided by the group. But these mental spaces, Halbwachs insisted, always receive support from and refer back to the material spaces that particular social groups occupy.[94]

The fiddling club meets the necessary criteria to be defined as a group, averaging around fifty people for the jams. The makeup varies little from week to week. The material space for this social group is a small community hall with a number of chairs circled for the musicians and other chairs placed randomly about the room for the audience. The way the material space is arranged remains constant and unvarying. This arrangement provides a constant, unchangeable material space which Connerton says:

> ...that our mental equilibrium is, first and foremost, due to the fact that the physical objects with which we are in daily contact change little or not at all, so providing us with an image of permanence and stability...give us the illusion of not changing and of rediscovering the past in the present.[95]

Thus the material surroundings of the fiddle club supplies the permanence the members need in order to bring back past memories. However, it is the music that is connected to the material surroundings, and it is the music that is remembered. In fact, the material setting of the club is arranged much like the jams of the early twentieth century, where the chairs would be placed in a circle.

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[94] Connerton, How Societies Remember, p. 37.
[95] Connerton, How Societies Remember, p. 37.

Again, collective memories of the fiddling club are triggered by the common interests or goals of the group and by the physical surroundings. However, most of the members are in their late fifties or early sixties which means that in order to perpetuate their memories they need to introduce younger generations to the club and its music. To some extent this process has begun. Since I began this study five new people ranging in age from early teens to early thirties have joined and each week this number is growing. The question arises of how these collective memories are transmitted from the older to the younger generation. Connerton stresses that the primary way of transmitting memories is through verbal communication:

> It is necessary also that the older members of the group should not neglect to transmit these representations to the younger members of the group...of collective memory, we must acknowledge that much of what is being subsumed under that term refers, quite simply, to facts of communication between individuals.[96]

Communication between older club members and younger club members take place during jam sessions. Stories and memories told in this environment, along with "mentoring" or helping the younger generation with technique or repetoire problems they are experiencing are a major part of this process. In addition sponsoring young fiddlers to go to contests allows them to be introduced to older fiddlers and to learn from them.

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[96] Connerton, How Societies Remember, p. 38.

Although communication of memories is transmitted through the older generation of club members to the younger members, it is important that these memories are renewed through outside influences. Elizabeth Tonkin states:

> ...that memory and cognition are partly constituted by social relations and thus are also constitutive of society. We are all simultaneously bearers and makers of history, with discursive representations of pastness as one element in this generation and reproduction of social life.[97]

The memories the club members have of social relations in rural communities and within old tyme culture itself are not only formed from the personal relationships but also from society itself. Consequently, even though the past is being re-enacted in this club, it is also being reconstructed due to the outside influence of society.

Memory Recall: The Importance of the Family Unit

Families play an important role in helping us to remember and to transmit past occurrences that form collective memories. Irwin-Zarecka states that:

> Family dinners and gatherings for special occasions are a prime time for the construction, reconstruction, and repair of familial memory; a guest who is a stranger, no matter how welcome would he be made to feel, ends up left out. And if that guest is not to remain a guest, he needs to patiently sit through the old stories until he too can be a part of the new ones.[98]

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[97] Elizabeth Tonkin, Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 97.
[98] Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory (New Brunswick: Tranaction Publishers, 1994), p. 55.

Many of the members of the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association have acquired knowledge of old tyme music through family members. In some cases a parent, sibling, or aunt and uncle played an old tyme instrument. In others relatives or friends had a keen interest in old tyme music which they passed on. During formal interviews I frequently heard about family members who played old tyme music and instructed my consultants. For example, one of my consultants related that: "My uncle played fiddle and I remember being a kid and my dad played a guitar and sang of course and played the harmonica...he used to play at dances as well."[99]

Neighbours as well as family played a part in creating and recalling memories of old tyme music. In one of my interviews the musician told me:

> Well, I used to listen to it [old tyme music] when I was a kid. Dad played some of that too and we used to go to parties around Christmas time. We would go on the sleigh to Grandpa's. One guy had his guitar there and the people kept tapping their feet and they were playing that kind of music.[100]

I found this constant remembrance of musical experiences involving with family and neighbours to be an important factor in understanding not only how the musicians were introduced to old tyme music, but also how collective memory figured prominently in the history of their family and of old tyme music.

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[99] Club Member, Guy Tetreault, Interview, November 23, 1995.
[100] Tetreault, November 23, 1995.

Maurice Halbwachs in his book On Collective Memory, discusses the importance of family and collective memory:

> ...in the most traditional societies of today, each family has its proper mentality, its memories which it alone commemorates, and its secrets that are revealed only to its members. But these memories...consist not only of a series of individual images of the past. They are at the same time models, examples, and elements of teaching. They express the general attitude of the group; they not only reproduce its history but also define its nature and its qualities and weaknesses.[101]

This idea of family memories not as individual memories but as group or collective memories is pertinent to the study of the fiddling club. As previously mentioned, the fiddling club re-creates the past through their jam sessions. In order to re-create the past the members must have a picture of the past to work from. Family experiences are one of the ways they recall or remember the past. These family memories are important in the re-creation of the past because as Halbwachs stated they provide models, standards and principles of teaching.

Many of the events that took place in several member's families revolved around music and the social bonds created by the music. Unless one could view these experiences as collective then the re-creation of these memories by the fiddling club would not be possible. Halbwachs asks the following questions in support of the collective memory of family:

> Let us now suppose that we recall an event of our family life, which, as the saying goes, is engraved in our memory. Let us then try to eliminate from it these ideas and traditional judgments

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[101] Maurice Halbwachs, On Collective Memory, ed., trans., Lewis A. Coser. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 59.

> which define the mind of the family. What remains then? Is it even possible to accomplish such a dissociation, to distinguish in the recollection of the event "the image of that which happened only once and is focused on a moment of time and a single event" from the notions that in general express our experience of the actions and life-styles of our parents?[102]

Halbwachs proposes a model for remembering events in our family life that involves superimposing a number of recollections into one single event. For example, in one interview the club member described a memory of his uncle:

> My uncle played fiddle and I remember being a kid and my dad played a guitar and sang of course and played the harmonica. Anyway, my uncle used to come over and used to ask my dad to tune his fiddle. Dad used to tune his fiddle for him, and my dad was a fairly good musician. And uncle would try and play the fiddle and he was off half a key all the time and it sounded horrible...I got to hate the fiddle.[103]

This recollection involves more than an isolated few hours, and incorporates a series of times that he heard his uncle play badly into one single scene. In this brief statement about his uncle the club member has provided his audience with a glimpse of his uncle and the role he plays in this scene, and within his family.

Family reminiscences such as this allows us to learn about the past. Halbwachs asserts that:

> What we find is a reconstructed picture. In order to see it come to life in its bygone reality, it is through reflection rather than from its suspension that the author chooses this particular physical trait or that particular custom...A given scene which took place in our home, in which our parents were the principal actors, and which

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[102] Halbwachs, Collective Memory, p. 59.
[103] Club Member, Guy Tetreault, Interview, November 23, 1995.

> has been fixed in our memory therefore does not reappear as the depiction of a day such as we experienced it in the past. We compose it anew and introduce elements borrowed from several periods which preceded or followed the scene in question.[104]

Much of the information I received from the members about old tyme music arose out of reminiscences surrounding their families. These reminiscences were triggered through reflection rather than from the actual remembrance of the particular experience. In turn, through their reflections, the members created a picture which incorporated elements from various experiences into one scene. What the listener must remember is that this scene is not an accurate or true representation of that particular moment, but is a reconstruction by the member of an experience in the past.

When the members recall memories surrounding their family, which inevitably include music, they are renewing contact with the past and are, for a time transported into the past. While the club creates new memories its structure is based on re-creating memories of similar informal/formal gatherings (jam sessions). Halbwachs points out that:

> As often as we return to these events and figures and reflect upon them, they attract to themselves more reality instead of becoming simplified. So it is that within the framework of family memory many figures and facts do indeed serve as landmarks; but each figure expresses an entire character, as each fact recapitulates an entire period in the life of the group. They coexist as images and notions. When we reflect upon them, it seems indeed as if we had again taken up with the past. But this indicates simply that we

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[104] Maurice Halbwachs, On Collective Memory, ed., trans., Lewis A. Coser. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 60-61.

> feel capable, given this framework, or reconstructing the image of persons and facts.[105]

In a sense, the fiddling club functions as family, a group with very close social bonds. My hypothesis is that the members of the fiddling club are trying to re-create the social bonds found within their family and within their community as they were growing up. The members reconstruct memories of people and surroundings and project them into the structure and relationships found within the club. For example, in one of my interviews the club member stresses how important it was to him that he had the other members around him to help and encourage him. These relationships function like those found between family members.

> Myself, I get pointers all the time from *D*. He's been a Canadian champion a few years in a row. He lives five doors down, he lives next door to this Maritimer I hooked u p with at the contest. So I can go up there anytime I'm having a problem, he'll help me, so it's good to be surrounded by people that know what they're doing. Yes, I can't say enough about the club though...they've helped me out.[106]

These reproduced memories have created an identity for the club members. Elizabeth Tonkin points out that:

> People do not need discursive accounts to represent themselves as historical entities. Insofar as their memorisations create the sense of a past - even where there is no coherent stream of narrative but only of disparate individual recollections - they contribute to the experience of group identity *now*. They help to constitute the social, which has communicative as well as institutional aspects...It is to claim that people are thinking historically if they recognise

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[105] Halbwachs, On Collective Memory, p. 61.
[106] Club Member 3, Interview, November 30, 1995.

> themselves as part of a group and that this thought is action which helps them to be one.[107]

These processes of recollecting the past create a bond between the members of the club thereby unifying them together as a group. It is within this group that the club members express and reinforce their identity. For example, one of the club members told me about the experience that brought him into the club. This experience brought back memories of when he heard old tyme music as a child and even though he did not like the music when he was young, the thought of hearing it again was positive because it recalled the social bonds that this music created among his family.

> In the fall of 1993-- *A*, he's probably one of our better old tyme fiddlers, nice guy and *F*, who plays guitar invited me to go to their jam [old tyme.] They were having a jam. I said I wouldn't mind, that I enjoy listening to that told tyme music. I haven't heard it for a long time. So I went over there and I really got to like it I said, this is a lot better fiddle music then what Don Messer used to play is what I thought in my head. Used to be a Don Messer show on t.v. and when that thing came on it just reminded me of my uncle and his fiddle...I could never listen to it and yet mom and dad would sit there and listen to it all night. So it wasn't until I heard *A* play the fiddle and I thought this guy can really play music. And I got hooked on it again.[108]

Through the re-enactment of 'pastness', of social bonds found within individual memories, the group forms a community or subculture within the confines of a large, urban city. Tonkin corroborates this idea:

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[107] Elizabeth Tonkin, Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 111.
[108] Club Member, Guy Tetreault, Interview, November 23, 1995.

> And so the processes of social reproduction, of keeping social relationships alive, and therefore patterned, and of maintaining human organisations, depend not only on members' knowledge and expectations, on their memories, in other words, but their very ability to know, to interpret and indeed speak also depend on the cognitive skills which are developed in social interaction too.[109]

Oral History: Issues of Validity

When approaching a project where the history of the subject has been neglected in literature, one must turn to people instead. It is through the memories of the participants of that history that the subject is re-created. Historical construction from oral sources raises many questions and doubts. We might ask how valid oral histories are and to what extent these histories are accurate accounts. Bias, personal agendas and the distortion of memory mean discretion is advised on the part of the researcher.

Oral history or oral sources can be used in a variety of ways. First, they can be used to supplement written historical records by providing the insider's perspective. Second, oral sources can be used to complement written material by providing a personal view. Last, oral records can be used as primary documents. It is the last two functions in which I employ oral material.

The application of oral sources to complement written records does not prove to be as problematic as using them as primary sources.

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[109] Elizabeth Tonkin, Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 112.

Employing oral information in conjunction with written records tends to eliminate the question of the validity of the oral source. Nevertheless, this does not mean that written records provide the truth any more than oral sources. Written sources, too, are personal constructions of what has taken place and are consequently open to investigation. However, using oral records as primary material is problematic because there is nothing with which to compare it, in contrast to written sources where information can be compared and contrasted with different sources. Oral sources can be put to use as primary materials when there is "...information about a subject for which there are no or extremely few written accounts."[110] This happens to be the case with regard to old tyme music culture. Due to the lack of written material on the subject I have had to rely on oral accounts of the past history of old tyme music and its place in small towns. Although the validity of the information can be questioned they do provide a different perspective from literature on the subject:

> Two cardinal points about the nature of oral tradition need to be restated: first of all, people remember a vast amount of information and a wealth of detail that is never committed to writing, what all oral sources have in common is the special perspective they provide on the past. Written records speak to the point of *what happened*, while oral sources almost invariably provide insights into *how people felt about what happened*.[111]

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[110] Barbara Allen and William Lynwood Montell, From Memory to History: Using Oral Sources in Local Historical Research (Nashville, Tennessee: The American Association for State and Local History), p. 19.
[111] Allen and Montell, From Memory to History, pp. 20-21.

Despite personal bias and agendas, the information I acquired through interviews is invaluable to my understanding of old tyme music culture and the towns where it originated.

Memory: Sources of Distortion

There are a number of elements that influence how well a person can remember the past. Iwona Irwin-Zarecka in her book Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory discusses the factors that distort memory:

> Considering the vastness of the terrain of social life and how, of necessity, only limited space can be accorded to remembrance of things past, when is it useful to speak of "forgetting"? Taking our clues from memory practitioners, it appears that social forgetting is first and foremost that absence in collectively shared "reality of the past" that is recognized as such and deemed important to repair...This idea of social forgetting as something noticed and struggled against rests, of course, on the separation between those who accept such absent past as a given and those who do not.[112]

The history of old tyme music culture among the members of the club is both individually and collectively remembered. It is when the members collectively recall the past that social forgetting begins.

As most club members are from the same generation and from small towns, they consequently share, as Irwin-Zarecka puts it a "reality of the past." When members collectively remember they also collectively forget. What is collectively forgotten is as important as what is recalled:

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[112] Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory (New Brunswick: Tranaction Publishers, 1994), p. 115.

> The idea that when we speak of social forgetting we are speaking of a *noticed* absence implies, too, that collective forgetting, just as collective remembering, has its own history. What, at one point in time, seemed a perfectly natural lack of attention to details of the past, becomes, at another point in time, a significant omission. When groups whose experience had long been excluded from societal record fight against it being "forgotten," they are redefining that experience from one that did not deserve recording to one that does.[113]

While re-creating the past, the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association have collectively forgotten certain things. For example, in both the oral history given by the club members and the little written material on the subject of social bonds and music in rural towns, I have noted that there are little or no negative aspects attached to these social bonds found in rural towns. This appears to be somewhat problematic for there obviously were negative qualities in the social relationships in small communities. Part of the reason why this omission of negative qualities is significant to understanding the club has to do with re-creating the past. The club is reenacting a tradition that few people in Canada wrote about or promoted. Therefore it is up to clubs such as this one to keep this tradition alive. By leaving out negative aspects the club is promoting the survival of this tradition. It is necessary that the club members collectively forget negative memories in order to promote this tradition. This omission is significant as an example of selectively remembering or social forgetting, rather than merely forgetting part of the past.

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[113] Irwin-Zarecka, Frames of Remembrance, p. 116.

Another realm to social forgetting is providing a voice for those people or things that are absent. Irwin-Zarecka describes this as:

> ...many a work of historical investigation, by professionals or otherwise, opens with an explicit statement of purpose, that purpose being to restore to the deserving presence a fragment of the past. Once again, it is by giving a public voice to people once unknown or forgotten that an absence is both recognized and remedied.[114]

The fiddling club seeks to preserve and promote old tyme music and the culture that surrounds it, which has largely being forgotten by the wider population. In the club member's eyes and mine as well, this tradition is deserving of recognition both of a place in the past and a place in the future.

If the fiddling club possesses a collective memory of old tyme music and is seeking to re-create it today, then we must ask to what extent that re-creation is valid. Collective memory, dealing as it does with people, is open to different types of distortion of "truth." Irwin-Zarecka states that:

> Collective memory in particular may be increasingly recognized as both an all too selective and mediated version of the past (often when contrasted with findings of historical research), but that does not absolve it from judgements of accuracy. The essentially mythical structure of remembrance, the often all-too-obvious ideological bents, the emotional charge of symbols and disputes, in short, the expected departures from objective (and dry) facts do not make collective memory into a terrain of pure fiction. What they do do is necessitate a closer look at their own truth claims. For in order to understand how collective memory works, we must appreciate how it is framed in relation to its base-collective experience.[115]

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[114] Irwin-Zarecka, Frames of Remembrance, pp. 116-117.
[115] Irwin-Zarecka, Frames of Remembrance, p. 145.

Contrary to historical chronicles of the past, oral history or memory initiate attention and bring an emotional response. For example, when researching old tyme music my reaction to what I read was largely unemotional. However, when I conducted interviews with the members and heard firsthand accounts of old tyme music the experience was much more vivid, real and elicited an emotional response. Such is the case for collective experience; the members did not read about the history of old tyme, they lived it. Consequently, when remembering the club members translate these memories into a series of symbols:

> Unlike historical accounts of what happened, which ask us to learn and to understand, physical memory markers demand attention, action and feeling. They mark particular collective experiences as important, all the while crystallizing the particulars of the past into symbols. Sometimes, these symbols serve as closures in that they come to possess a definitive meaning. At other times, the range of possible readings is much wider, if never completely open. However we may judge such symbols in aesthetic terms, they work as art does. And their claims to truth are very much like those staked by art-of representing the true meaning of human experience.[116]

There are many symbols found within the fiddling club which serve as reminders of the past. The setting of the fiddling club is one such symbol. The positioning of the musician's chairs in a circle symbolizes the past experience when jams were held in someone's home, where everyone were friends or relatives and the social bonds were strong. The seating arrangement also promotes a sense of bonding by the relative proximity of

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[116] Irwin-Zarecka, Frames of Remembrance, p. 151.

each musician to the other. Here everyone is able to see everyone else, chatting with ease. These physical objects contribute to an overall feeling of camaraderie, closeness and friendship.

Another reminder of the past is the egalitarian relations among the music-makers. This equality among the members recalls the social structure of rural communities in the early twentieth century. Among the individuals in rural communities there was a feeling of equality, partially heightened by the fact that most people were in similar situations. Also the members share characteristics such as being seniors which are treated with respect and are valued in this club. This equal treatment between the music-makers contributes to forming close social bonds and re-creating the intimate bonds between individuals in rural communities.

An additional element that serves to bring the club members closer together is the activities they share with each other outside of the club. When the members recall old tyme music gatherings of their past, these gatherings were with the same people they shared other activities with such as working, going to school, attending church, etc. Although the club members do not spend as much time together as old tyme music-makers of the past, they do see each other outside of the club. Many of the members camp together in the summer, most frequently when they go to fiddle contests. Others socialize with one another outside of the club, and some are neighbours. A few of the members belong to other clubs such as

community leagues where they play cards together. These outside activities further strengthen the social bonds the members create with each other.

Having reviewed the various ways the fiddling club has re-created the past, one must now look at the source of memory, the validity of oral history. For a genre such as old tyme music where there is little written history on the subject one must turn to oral subjects in order to understand the origins of old tyme music. There has long been a debate between memory and history. In his article "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*, Pierre Nora states the difference between these two ways of recalling the past:

> Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic-responsive to each avenue of conveyance or phenomenal screen, to every censorship or projection...Memory is blind to all but the group it binds...History, on the other hand, belongs to everyone and to no one, whence its claim to universal authority. Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects; history binds itself strictly to

> temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things. Memory is absolute, while history can only conceive the relative.[117]

It is obvious that there are difficulties when relying on either memory or history when studying the past. In this study of the fiddling club, I have had to rely mostly on oral sources; both in the form of interviews and in written literature consisting of secondary material such as letters, memoirs, and historical literature originating from the small towns themselves. Because the use of memory has been instrumental to this study it is necessary to discuss the problems associated with oral history as outlined in the above quote.

As previously mentioned, memory is subject to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting. When memories have been dormant for a period of time and are revived it is inevitable that we, as humans, will forget part of the past. In her article, "What One Cannot Remember Mistakenly," Karen Fields points out that:

> Memory fails, leaving blanks, and memory fails by filling blanks mistakenly. In filling blanks mistakenly, memory collaborates with forces separate from actual past events, forces such as an individual's wishes, a group's suggestions, a moment's connotations, an environment's clues, an emotion's demands, a self's evolution, a mind's manufacture of order, and, yes, even a researcher's objectives...We seek to understand these imperfections systematically...we seek to correct for them if we are scholars who use memory as source. As researchers, we bind ourselves to

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[117] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*," in History and Memory in African-American Culture, ed., Genevieve Fabre and Robert O'Meally (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1994), pp. 285-286.

> skepticism about memory and to a definite methodological mistrust of rememberers who are our informants.[118]

In my interviews with some of the musicians from the club and in the informal discussions I had with the members I found that forgetting did play a part in their descriptions of rural communities and the social relationships found within them. For example, in all the portrayals of life in these rural communities any negative aspects associated with living in a small community were not mentioned. In fact the members never revealed any negative characteristics dealing with these rural areas, with the social aspect of life there or with old tyme music itself.

This apparent neglect to introduce disagreeable remembrances of small town community life leaves, what Fields terms a "blank." This blank has been filled in by the members mistakenly because there are unfavorable attributes associated with every situation. One can only speculate has to what motivated the absence of these memories. One possible explanation is the fact that music is connected with these memories and consequently it promotes a positive image of the past. Second, the club is itself a small community, where the same people get together weekly. In order to keep personal relations running smoothly, negative aspects are suppressed, much the same way they are when the club members describe these rural towns. Third, the club members are

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[118] Karen Fields, "What One Cannot Remember Mistakenly," in History and Memory in African-American Culture, eds., Genevieve Fabre and Robert O'Meally (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc. 1994), p. 150.

trying to promote old tyme music and any negative characteristics associated with it would be detrimental to its survival.

Conclusion: Re-creating the Past

After reviewing the history of old tyme music, including its origins, practitioners, instruments, and the culture surrounding it, we gain a sense that there is much more to this genre than just the music. A description of old tyme practitioner's backgrounds incorporating a portrait of rural towns in the early twentieth century has shown that music played an important role in the social lives of these people. Through this information and material dealing with social groups and memory I formed my hypothesis that the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association is re-creating the social environment of a rural community. Has this idea been validated?

At the beginning of this study I proposed a number of questions that I believe have now been addressed. First, why has there been so little written about old tyme music? I demonstrated through the historical overview of old tyme that it is a music originated and associated with rural people of both Canada and the United States. Consequently, it is from the oral tradition and is passed on to each generation this way. Although other oral traditions have been widely popularized in literature, such as English ballads collected and catalogued by Frances James Child

and further worked upon by Bertrand Harris Bronson, old tyme music remains neglected.

One explanation for this absence is the virtual disappearance of old tyme music from the recording scene during the 1940's and the 1950's. During the 1920's and the 1930's there had been a rush to record old tyme musicians by record companies but old tyme's popularity was soon replaced by country and western music. By the time it reappeared in the folk revivals of the 1960's and the 1970's few old tyme musicians were left. Consequently, all the literature written about old tyme were either biographies or the geographical tracing of tunes, due to the lack of a flourishing culture. The absence of old tyme from the music scene and the overwhelming popularity of country and western music may be the reason it has been neglected it literature.

These approaches lead into the question of why are there no studies done on the history and development of old tyme music. The lack of these types of studies done on old tyme is the same as previously mentioned; the absence of old tyme from the music scene for a period of time, and the popularity of biographical and geographical approaches to the study of music.

Another possible reason old tyme music has been neglected in literature is that it is not connected to any particular ethnic group, but is "generic", originating in rural life. Other ethnic groups have urban

constituencies and representatives in academia, such as Ukrainian where there are numerous professional groups in urban centres and programs in universities. In comparison, old tyme music is connected to rural groups and does not have anyone advocating it in academia or in the professional realm of music in urban centres.

A biographical approach is not new to the field of ethnomusicology, nor are geographical studies. Biographical studies focus on the life of individual music-makers. Geographical studies center on tracing the musical development of tunes as they "travel" from geographical area to geographical area. They concentrate on the transformation of these tunes from the "originals" and on the process of dissemination. A historical approach which encompasses both the culture and the music of old tyme was possibly avoided due to the lack of resources.

The little written material that deals with old tyme music is scattered throughout Canada and the United States, being found in the forms of letters, memoirs, historical society journals and in the minds of its practitioners. Even when using all of these sources it is still difficult to provide an accurate picture of the history and culture of old tyme. I have tried to do this in this study, however I can not claim my information to be the "truth." It is a reconstruction of what I believe is an accurate picture of old tyme and what my consultants believe to be true.

While keeping in mind that any history is a reconstruction of sorts, rebuilding the history of a genre that is from the oral tradition is particularly problematic. Unlike the literary tradition with recorded documents that can be compared, oral tradition relies on the memories of its participants. Consequently, memories undergo a transformation with each individual and are constantly being reconstructed. This is especially true of this study because I have relied heavily on the memories of the club members. My hypothesis that the club appears to re-create the social environment of a rural community is based both upon the club member's memories and my own interpretation of what I observed. Part of this idea was formed by my consultants knowledge of rural communities and my own knowledge of small towns.

Using both oral and written sources I attempted to look at the role of music in rural communities in the early twentieth century. At the beginning of this study I asked several questions pertaining to my hypothesis which dealt with elements of rural communities. First, when at its height, how did old tyme music figure into the lives of people in rural communities. The answer, in chapter two was that music played an important role in the lives of rural people in the early twentieth century. Music served as the vehicle for bringing people together to renew old ties and to socialize. Although other types of music were used for this

purpose, old tyme music was one of the most popular. In addition, music was one of the main sources of entertainment for families.

Old tyme music is the key to the club creating the social atmosphere found in rural communities. It is the music that brings the club members together; it is the "reason" that people come to this club. One could leave it at that, that this is the sole purpose of the club and there are no other reasons behind the group's meetings. However, incorporating Clifford Geertz's idea that cultures are made up of a number of layers of meaning, we must delve deeper to uncover all these meanings, a process he refers to as "thick description." A superficial analysis of the club would reveal that the reason people come to this club is for the music, producing a "thin description." Yet, when we look below the surface we find there are many more levels to this.

Old tyme music is what draws people to the club. It is the primary reason the club exists, providing a common bond between members. Peeling back a layer we discover that participants share a similar background, most originating from rural towns. Deeper still, we find most of the members grew up with some form of old tyme music, whether it be through records, radio, television, or a family member who was an old tyme musician. From this knowledge we can postulate that old tyme music remains as it was then, a vehicle for socializing. Recollections in interviews reveal members going to neighbour's houses and hearing old

tyme music on records or from live musicians. Today, it appears that the club members use this music to draw themselves together and to socialize. As in the past, the music almost becomes secondary to the visiting that takes place during the jams.

While music evidently plays an important part in this re-enactment, is it the key to what holds this group together? Over the past sixteen months that I attended the club, there have been numerous threats to the club's existence. However, the club has thrived instead, gaining in size to the point where the hall is becoming crowded. This points to an unusually strong bond that holds this club together. I believe that the social bonds made in this club, re-creations of similar bonds in rural communities of times past, account for why this club endures.

If social bonds keep the club together, then how is the club re-creating the social atmosphere found in rural communities? First and most obvious, old tyme music is the main instrument for reproducing this character. Second, the physical layout of the club contributes to this feeling. For example, the circle of musicians is similar to the setup of the informal music gatherings of rural communities in the early twentieth century. Frequently these gatherings were held in someone's home and chairs would be placed about the living room in a circle. The circle arrangement also promotes discussion and visiting between the musicians because everyone can see everyone else. Again, as in the past the

listeners or audience form a sort of semi-circle around the room, facing the circle of musicians. This allows them both to watch the musicians and to talk amongst themselves.

Furthermore, the club re-creates the social atmosphere of rural communities through their own memories. As mentioned previously their memories are reconstructions of the past, subject to distortion. This distortion can take many forms such as forgetting, personal bias/agenda, and storytelling. For example, all recollections of socializing and music-making in rural communities were bereft of negative elements. Whether they have forgotten or have actively forgotten the negative connotations associated with small towns, or whether they just chose not to voice them, influences the way they reconstruct these memories in the club. They are idealizing these memories because there were adverse characteristics attached to these remembrances.

Given these distortions, what are the club members re-creating? First, they are reconstructing their impression of memories. There is no possible way they can exactly re-create the conditions during which social bonds were formed or strengthened, because most of the members were too young to recall these experiences accurately. Second, even if they could remember clearly, their memories would be influenced by their own agendas. Third, they are re-creating these memories in a voluntary association, a subculture in a larger urban setting, as opposed to living in

a rural community and experiencing the social interaction firsthand. Therefore, they are presenting their version of the idealized social atmosphere of rural towns.

Old tyme music virtually disappeared from the recording scene for almost twenty years. It seems that if the club is trying to re-create the atmosphere of old tyme music when it was at its height, they would need to alter it to fit the circumstances they are in today so that it would not die out completely. These alterations take a number of forms. First, old tyme music is not being re-created in a rural community, but in the large, urban centre of Edmonton. The experience is no longer shared by an entire community but by a select group of individuals. Second, other genres of music besides old tyme are allowed such as Maritime fiddle music, bluegrass and country and western. If the club were to present a replica of old tyme music gatherings in the early twentieth century, these other musical forms would not be present.

The club is aware that old tyme music is in danger of extinction, which accounts for why they tolerate other types of music. In order to keep this tradition alive, it will have to change. We can compare how this tradition might change with the revival and popularization of Maritime fiddle music. Within the last two years there has been a huge rise in the popularity of Maritime fiddle music in Canada, largely due to the work of fiddlers Ashley MacIssac and Natalie MacMaster. MacIssac has taken

traditional Cape Breton music and revolutionized it. He has "introduced fiddling to a whole new generation with his wild playing and Hendrix-style theatrics."[119] This has led the way to a revival of Cape Breton fiddle music. MacMaster's style is firmly established in the Scottish folk music of Cape Breton, although she does perform some non-traditional tunes. These two fiddlers have led the way for a revitalization of fiddle music:

> Fiddling's new cachet is quite a change for a musical style that, 20 years ago, was in danger of dying out. Once considered inherently unhip, suited only for square dances, fiddling used to be snubbed by the 'in' circle of music listeners. It was MacIssac who made it impossible to ignore, bringing fiddling to discos, rock clubs and concert halls, and setting the stage for a new generation of fiddlers.[120]

This Maritime tradition, like old tyme, was in danger of dying out. However, it remained alive and is now flourishing because it has allowed for change. It is this type of change that must take place within the Wild Rose Old Tyme Fiddler's Association. Although they are passing down their wealth of musical and cultural knowledge of old tyme to the next generation, they are allowing for and perpetuating change within the genre. The admission of other genres into the club means that old tyme is destined to be influenced and changed by these other styles.

The influence of other styles on old tyme music within this club leads one to speculate whether it is really the music the club members are

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[119] Lynn Saxberg and Bob Remington, Fiddle Frenzy (Ottawa and Edmonton: Ottawa Citizen and The Edmonton Journal, March 1997), p. C1.

[120] Saxberg and Remington, Fiddle Frenzy, p. C1.

trying to preserve or the culture that surrounds this music. My hypothesis corroborates my belief that while the members do want to keep old tyme music alive, the maintaining of the old tyme culture can not be separated from the music and so, becomes a goal.

Finally, we come to the question of how this study relates and contributes to the field of ethnomusicology. Although the focus of this study was not directly on the music, but on music as a vehicle for social interaction, it does contribute to the general knowledge of old tyme music and the culture surrounding it. We have found within this particular musical tradition layers of meaning that extend far deeper than the music itself. Music is used as the mode for bringing together a group of individuals within an urban centre and re-creating the social atmosphere of a rural community. Music is also the trigger for the recall of memories dealing both with the music and the culture it was found in.

Through this study we have learned how a particular group in society remembers their past, what experiences they selectively recall, where they place themselves in society and how they interact with one another and with society at large. We can see within this small tradition that music is the vehicle by which the participants articulate meaning that is unique to this tradition and group of individuals.

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